

## 'Rifleman' keeps fingers agile at the violin

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Seven decades after playing for the three world leaders negotiating the future of post-World War II Europe, Stuart Canin is still performing on the violin and regaling Bay Area audiences with his story of a young man thrust into the spotlight.

The 90-year-old Canin, who lives in Berkeley, is the subject of a 15-minute documentary that will be the centerpiece event of the [Silicon Valley Jewish Film Festival](#), which is celebrating its 25th anniversary with a lineup of 27 movies.

Canin also will perform a 45-minute program of violin works after the film, "[The Rifleman's Violin](#)," is shown on Nov. 12. He will reprise the works he performed for Harry Truman, Winston Churchill and Josef Stalin at their Potsdam conference in 1945.

The film festival, which debuted in 1992 with a lineup of four films and now includes 39 screenings of movies from the U.S., Israel and five other countries, runs Oct. 27 to Nov. 20 at the AMC Saratoga 14 in San Jose and the Oshman Family Jewish Community Center in Palo Alto.



*Stuart Canin of Berkeley, now 90, as a young man in "The Rifleman's Violin"*

The opening-night film will be "Celebration: The Story of Israeli Cinema," a documentary focusing on the history of filmmaking in the Jewish state from the 1960s until now. Israeli film producer Arik Bernstein and actor Mike Burstyn will talk about Israeli cinema after the showing.

Amos Oz, the Israeli author whose autobiographical "A Tale of Love and Darkness" has been made into a film directed by Natalie Portman, will appear at the festival when the film is screened at the JCC on Nov. 16. Advance tickets for Oz's talk sold out in three days, said festival executive director Tzvia Shelef, but tickets may be available at the door.

The festival's closing-night film will be "The Last Laugh," which examines what is off limits in comedy and whether subjects as nightmarish as the Holocaust are valid targets for humor.

Canin was drafted into the U.S. Army in 1944 after being accepted as a violin student at Juilliard, and sent to Europe as a rifleman. He soon began practicing his violin with pianist Eugene List, and the two of them were asked to play for wounded troops around Paris.

Canin, then 19, and List developed a program of five works — three by the Austrian-born violinist and

composer Fritz Kreisler; a Kreisler-arranged piece from the opera "La Vida Breve" by Manuel de Falla, and the slow movement from Polish violinist and composer Henri Wieniawski's D-minor concerto.

"We chose short things — if you're wounded you're not in a great mood," Canin said in a phone interview. "We kind of arranged it so it would not be boring for these guys, since there was no place they could go if they didn't like it."

One day, a commanding officer told them to pack for a flight to Berlin to entertain President Truman. They flew there with actor Mickey Rooney and singer Bobby Breen, and the four of them were housed in a tent.

Canin and List were brought to Truman's temporary residence, and were surprised when Churchill and Stalin showed up for dinner.

"Churchill had a cigar about 3 feet long. The three of them sat on a big sofa — Truman in the middle, Churchill on his right and Stalin on his left. I had put my violin behind the upright piano, and a Russian aide closely watched me as I took my violin out of the case," Canin remembers. "I will never forget the occasion."

Truman, a decent pianist, later sent Canin a picture of the three leaders on which the president wrote: "Best wishes to an excellent violinist."

Canin, who at the age of 10 had performed on the Fred Allen radio hour, said he never had to fire his rifle before the war ended and came home to study at Juilliard. He went on to become the first American violinist to win Italy's Paganini Competition.

He later became concertmaster of the San Francisco Symphony, played with the San Francisco Opera and was the first music director of the S.F.-based New Century Chamber Orchestra.

After the film festival showing on Nov. 12, Canin and pianist Helene Wickett will perform the five works presented to the world leaders in Potsdam. Sam Ball, who directed the film about Canin's 1945 performance, also will speak at a post-concert discussion.

"I still practice every day, an hour in the morning," Canin said. "I keep my fingers moving, and that's why 71 years after I played for the Big Three I can keep going."

**Silicon Valley Jewish Film Festival**, Oct. 27-Nov. 20 at the Oshman Family JCC in Palo Alto and AMC Saratoga 14 in San Jose. <http://www.svjff.org>