



"Charlotte," an animated WWII film about a German Jewish painter voiced by Keira Knightley, will screen as part of the Silicon Valley Jewish Film Festival.

CULTUREFILM

Silicon Valley Jewish Film Festival to feature stories of love, war and restitution

BY **LAUREN HAKIMI** | OCTOBER 12, 2022

What happens when your teacher tries to convince you that your Jewish neighbor wants to kill and eat you?

For 7-year-old Sero, the charming star of “Neighbours,” the allegation seems a bit ridiculous — and yet, he’d rather be safe than sorry. So when the Syrian Kurd goes to his neighbor’s house to light their Shabbat candles, he stays close to his dad and cringes when he makes him accept a kiss from his host.

The 2021 drama, which focuses on the violent suppression of Kurdish culture and language in the Middle East, is tragic at almost every turn. It resonates with the history of Jews in the Soviet Union, Native

Americans sent to boarding schools and [the modern reality of Uyghurs in China](#). Yet the film is also touching, and ends on a note that is simultaneously extremely tragic and full of love.

Directed by Mano Khalil, the subtitled “Neighbours” is a closing-night selection at the all-virtual [Silicon Valley Jewish Film Festival](#), which runs Oct. 23 through Nov. 6 and includes 30 films from the U.S., Israel, Norway and beyond. The cost is \$12 each for each film, [or \\$250 and up for a full-festival pass](#), and after each film’s listed date and time, viewers will have 72 hours to start the film (and then an additional 72 hours to finish it).

While many film festivals are being held in person this year, SVJFF organizers opted to [stick with streaming](#) for a third year in a row.

“We asked some of our audience what they prefer, and we see numbers are still very high of people who do not want to come to the theater,” said [Tzvia Shelef](#), the festival’s executive director. She said the decision of how to hold the festival had to be made in May, when the board wasn’t sure what the Covid-19 situation would look like in the fall.

“I would think people would be fed up just watching stuff at home, but the numbers have not gone down,” Shelef said. “People are still signing up.”

Shelef said her hope is that in future years, the festival will become a hybrid event, offering both the flexibility of watching films at home and the in-person sense of community one experiences at a Jewish film festival.

This year’s opening night film is [“Fiddler’s Journey to the Big Screen,”](#) a 2022 documentary about “Fiddler on the Roof” narrated by actor Jeff Goldblum and featuring interviews with many who played Tevye, including Topol, who starred in the 1971 movie.

[Other highlights](#) include “Our (Almost Completely True) Story,” a Woody Allen–esque rom-com that follows an aging voice actor as he navigates the L.A. dating scene, and several documentaries about Israeli public figures: “What If? Ehud Barak on War and Peace” and “Upheaval: The Journey of Menachem Begin” focus on former Israeli prime ministers; “Grossman” is about the author David Grossman; and “The Fourth Window” profiles the late author Amos Oz.

Another documentary in the lineup is “Bully. Coward. Victim. The Story of Roy Cohn,” a look at the infamous U.S. lawyer that premiered on HBO in 2020. Like Forrest Gump’s evil twin, Cohn was behind many of the 20th century’s most notorious events. He prosecuted accused spies Ethel and Julius

Rosenberg, served as a lawyer for the mob and defended a certain real-estate-mogul-slash-future-president who was being sued by the Justice Department for housing discrimination.

However, Cohn is perhaps best remembered for his work as chief counsel to Joseph McCarthy during the senator's anticommunist campaign in the 1950s. McCarthyism's accusatory net included many Jews and gay people, and Cohn was both of those (the end of the film focuses on his attempts to prevent the public from finding out he was dying of AIDS).

The 94-minute film includes a subplot featuring the sons of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg as they worked to clear their parents' record. The director of the film, Ivy Meeropol, is the Rosenbergs' granddaughter; she and her father, who was 10 when his parents were electrocuted, speak during a Q&A after the movie ends — [one of nine post-movie programs available](#).

Other selections include "Rose," a French film about a woman who explores love and sex as an aging widow; "Perfect Strangers," an Israeli dramedy about a group of friends who decide to play a game where they read each other's text messages; and "Charlotte," an animated French drama about a German Jewish painter, voiced by [Keira Knightley](#), during World War II.

Apart from the film festival, SVJFF also is hosting some events with Holocaust survivor-turned-klezmer musician Saul Dreier. Students at Kehillah Jewish High School and Gideon Hausner Jewish Day School in Palo Alto, Ronald C. Wornick Jewish Day School in Foster City and Yavneh Day School in Los Altos will watch the 80-minute documentary "Saul & Ruby's Holocaust Survivor Band" and then hear from the 97-year-old Dreier, who [will perform](#) with Hot Kugel at the Addison-Penzak JCC in Los Gatos on Oct. 23.

Silicon Valley Jewish Film Festival

Online Oct. 23 through Nov. 6. \$12, or \$250 and up for festival pass.