

More Than Hallelujah: The Silicon Valley Jewish Film Festival Returns

This year's SV Jewish Film Festival will be showing some well-known classics

By Gary Singh

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Leonard Cohen will return to Silicon Valley next week, virtually and posthumously. Just the way he'd like it.

Beginning on Sunday, Oct. 15, the **Silicon Valley Jewish Film Festival** erupts with real-life events in addition to a wide palette of online screenings.

Cohen will appear on electronic devices only. As part of the festival, the documentary, *Hallelujah: Leonard Cohen, a Journey, a Song*, will stream on the Eventive platform Thursday, Oct. 19 at 8:30pm, followed by an interview with producer-directors, Dan Geller and Dayna Goldfine. A ticket purchase allows you to watch it anytime over the next three days.

The feature-length documentary takes us through a simplified version of Leonard's unsimplified journey from the streets of Montreal's Westmount neighborhood through several creative peaks and valleys, but seen through the prism of his internationally iconic tune, "Hallelujah," in all its complicated evolution. People involved with the production of Cohen's records tell the sordid story of how the Various Positions LP with that song, "Hallelujah," almost never even happened. Industry executives didn't understand it at the time. They thought Cohen's career was over. No one predicted millions of people all over the world, spawned by John Cale, Jeff Buckley and Shrek, would later elevate the tune into everyday consciousness.

Geller and Goldfine's film, while just one particular window into Leonard's complex life, is a must for any fan of the creative process. Leonard careened his way through many identities and his presence will be felt by all those streaming the flick as part of the Silicon Valley Jewish Film Festival.



LIVES TOUCHED WHAT WAS EXPECTED TO BE AN UNDERDOG, THE SONG "HALLELUJAH" TURNED INTO A GLOBAL SUCCESS. PHOTO SILICON VALLEY JEWISH FILM FESTIVAL

I, for one, cannot wait because Leonard's history on this very page runs deep. After he passed away in November of 2016, I made sure my next trip to Montreal the following summer included a visit to Cohen's grave. At the time, his headstone had not yet been placed, so the experience made for one hell of a column.

Leonard is buried alongside his family in the Shaar Hashomayim Cemetery on Mont-Royal, the hill that gave Montreal its name. As I skulked through the gate and into the cemetery, a few maintenance workers were standing there, just inside the gate. Before I even said a word, they looked at me and said, "Cohen? He's right over there." They pointed a few gravestones over. They knew exactly who I was looking for without me even asking. In other words, I didn't have to knock, the gate was open and the gatekeepers showed me the way.

At the time, no one bothered to tell me that in Judaism the headstone is often not placed at the gravesite until a year later, so I spent the next several years telling people all over the world about my visit to "Leonard Cohen's unmarked grave," not even understanding the real reason, and making a fool out of myself in the process.

Cohen had a dark sense of humor, so I'm sure he's forgiven me by now. Nevertheless, that was the closest I ever got to meeting the dude.

But the rest of you don't have to go through all of that. Next Thursday the 19th, *Hallelujah*, the film, will stream right to your device, thanks to the Silicon Valley Jewish Film Festival, which has been around for 32 years now. That's quite a run.

Yet Leonard is not the only ghost haunting the festival. The whole shebang kicks off this Sunday, Oct. 15th when *Remembering Gene Wilder* screens at the Mountain View ICON at 7pm.

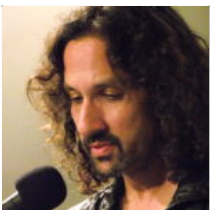
Wilder was universally adored, proudly Jewish, and gave so much to the world. I have many friends who still won't stop quoting lines from *Young Frankenstein* and *Willy Wonka*. Following the screening, an in-person program will likewise unfold, featuring director Ron Frank and producers David Knight and Julie Nimoy. The latter is Leonard Nimoy's daughter.

As if that wasn't enough, the festival closes out Sunday, Oct. 29th, also at the Mountain View ICON, with a Bella Abzug documentary—*Bella!*—in which the legendary feminist politician and antiwar crusader comes alive on the screen. Once again, a post-film program will unfold, this time with director Jeff L. Lieberman.

I can almost hear Leonard from his grave in Montreal, voicing his posthumous approval.

Silicon Valley Jewish Film Festival. Oct. 15 – 29

[Online program](#) available at svjff.org



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Gary Singh's byline has appeared over 1500 times, including newspaper columns, travel essays, art and music criticism, profiles, business journalism, lifestyle articles, poetry and short fiction. He is the author of *The San Jose Earthquakes: A Seismic Soccer Legacy* (2015, The History Press) and was recently a Steinbeck Fellow in Creative Writing at San Jose State University. An anthology of his Metro columns, *Silicon Alleys*, was published in 2020.