



J'ACCUSE! Arieh Worthalter portrays the lead character in *'The Goldman Case,'* screening at the Silicon Valley Jewish Film Festival.

SCREEN SHOTS

Two film festivals roll out in Silicon Valley this week **BY JEFFREY EDALATPOUR**

AT THE END of October, two annual film festivals (with similar acronyms) return to encourage short- and long-form binge watching. Launching first on Oct. 24, the 16th annual San Jose International Short Film Festival (SJSFF) has scheduled four days of programming at the CineArts Theatre in Santana Row.

Like a literary short story, a short film only has to suggest a world rather than having to build one entirely from scratch. Of the 100+

films to choose from, *Black Mirror*, the consistently dystopian anthology series by Charlie Brooker, is an undeniable source of inspiration for many of the narrative filmmakers. About-faces and abrupt tonal shifts can also characterize the limits of a short film's story arc.

Stéphanie Bélanger's *Lumen* harnesses all of the internet's potential for menace and then upends it by arranging an IRL meeting for the characters.

In Kathy Fusco's *Catherine & Michael*, the 1980s film star Molly Ringwald plays a middle-aged woman whose marriage is passionless. It's hard not to see Catherine as an

extension of Ringwald's iconic adolescent characters. If Andie from *Pretty in Pink* (1986) had been able to predict a marriage stifled by domestic boredom, she never would have chosen Blane over Duckie.

Included in the Saturday night sci-fi programming lineup titled "The World Beyond," Victoria Warmerdam's *I'm Not a Robot* recalls a 1960 episode of *The Twilight Zone* (aka *Black Mirror*'s template), "The Lateness of the Hour," starring Inger Stevens. Warmerdam's female protagonist, like Stevens' character Jana, quickly discovers that something's not right about her identity. Warmerdam's idea runs parallel to Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, *The Stepford Wives*, as well as the simulation hypothesis. The short ends with an ellipsis suggesting that a sequel or full-length film is in the works.

In *Favourites*, Australian filmmaker Nick Russell decides to structure his short around a single joke. The punchline works because it's delivered by the dependable character actor Stephen Curry (*Fisk*). Curry

provides all of the comic energy in the short with a delicious portion of ham and eye-goggling.

In addition to sci-fi and comedy, SJSFF also features shorts with more serious intentions. *My Week with Maisy* stars Joanna Lumley (*Absolutely Fabulous*) as a prim, grumpy patient who shares a hospital infusion room with someone who's much more optimistic despite the circumstances.

Now in its 33rd year, the Silicon Valley Jewish Film Festival (SVJFF) begins on Oct. 26 and runs, virtually and in theaters, through Nov. 10. The subject matter ranges widely this year: Shari Lewis and her famous puppet Lamb Chop, the Catskills summer resort, the Holocaust, anti-semitism, the formation of the Israeli state, and two documentaries covering different angles of the Hamas attack at the Nova music festival in 2023.

On Nov. 4, there are two films screening virtually as an engrossing double feature. At this year's César Awards, Arieh Worthalter won



Contributed

SHORT SUBJECT San Jose native David Michael Maurer (second from left) is in town for a 2pm screening on Oct. 27 of 'Mendo's Carousel,' starring Todd Grinnell, Edi Gathegi and Otmara Marrero, at the San Jose International Short Film Festival.

Best Actor for his portrayal of the French left-wing revolutionary Pierre Goldman in *The Goldman Case*. Cédric Kahn's courtroom drama revitalizes a genre that's been drained of energy by a glut of too many television procedurals.

As Goldman, Worthalter communicates his character's frustrations by demonstrating the man's combative, thrilling and nakedly honest intellect. Goldman is only ever seen in jail or pent up like a caged animal in the defendant's staging box. Witness after witness claims to have seen him at the site of a murder scene that took place in 1969. But Goldman and his team of defense lawyers consistently reframe the narrative of the day in question.

Based on a true story, the film confronts bureaucratic and societal prejudices without exactly exonerating Goldman. On the stand, he admits to a series of other crimes but not to the murders he's accused

of. Kahn and co-writer Nathalie Hertzberg present a deeply flawed and deeply troubled but brilliant man who, under different circumstances, might have become a charismatic political leader. Ultimately, they resist making him into a martyr.

Michael Winterbottom's directorial résumé highlights his ability to work in any film genre. He makes trenchant political satires (*This England*) as easily as he can a Steve Coogan comedy (*The Trip* trilogy). His latest movie, *Shoshana*, is an attempt to make an epic wartime romance on the scale of *The English Patient*.

While *Shoshana* lacks the lyric imagery in Anthony Minghella's film, it's dense with partisan rage. Set at the beginning stages of the Zionist cause to establish the state of Israel, the plot is structured around conflicts both big (political) and small (personal). In *Shoshana*, war is an unstoppable force that's making its way forward, bomb after bomb, into the future. **M**

OCT 24 THRU NOV 10
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svjff.org

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