



"Closed Season" is a multilayered film that begins in 1970 and flashes back to the 1940s.

Dramas anchor back end of Jewish Film Festival lineup

'G-d's Neighbors,' 'Closed Season' and 'In the Shadow' among the top offerings

By Daniel M. Kimmel

Some strong dramas pop up during the back end of JewishFilm.2013.

"G-d's Neighbors" (Museum of Fine Arts, Friday, April 19, 6 p.m.; West Newton Cinema, Sunday, April 21, 5:15 p.m.) is an Israeli film about Avi (Roy Assaf), a young Breslov Hasid who smokes dope, composes music

Movie Maven

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THE JEWISH ADVOCATE®

Friday April 19, 2013

and is fervently religious. He also joins his friends in physically attacking those who violate the Sabbath or women who dress in a fashion they deem immodest.

Yet the film isn't really a polemic about extremism of the fervently Orthodox. Instead it's about Avi wrestling with the multiple contradictions in his life and realizing that attacking Arabs or secular Israeli Jews is not what the Torah commands. When Miri (Rotem Zisman-Cohen) moves into the neighborhood, Ari starts to question not his commitment to a religious life but to the way he has been expressing it. This is a subtle, complex film that should challenge Orthodox, non-Orthodox and secular Jews alike.

"Closed Season" (MFA, Saturday, April 20, 12:30 p.m.) is a Germany/Israel co-production that you think gives away the ending in its prologue but peels back layer after layer like an onion. In Israel, in 1970, a young German man presents himself to an Israeli kibbutznik as his son. Flashback to 1940s Germany, where Albert (Christian Friedel) is a Jew trying to avoid capture who finds a hiding place on a remote farm. There a peasant couple (Hans-Jochen Wagner, Brigitte Hobmeier) provide him sanctuary, but he soon finds he will have to pay a steep price. The farmer wants Albert to provide the means for the childless couple to produce an heir. Thanks to the prologue we are focused on the impact of this situation on the three people rather than wondering if the plan will work. What people will do to survive or because they think it is necessary is extraordinary, with each person learning that they can't predict the impact of their choices.

Finally, "In the Shadow" (MFA, Saturday, April 20, 2:45 p.m.; West Newton Cinema, Sunday, April 21, 7:15 p.m.) is Czech Republic/Poland/Israel co-production that is one of the must-see films of the festival. It is a film where none of the main characters are Jewish and yet it is all about the fate of the Jews. While some movies champion the idea of how one person can make a difference, this is a film about how a corrupt system crushes anyone in its path.

In 1953, Prague police Capt. Hakl (Ivan Trojan) is investigating a routine jewel heist when he is told the case is being taken over by Maj. Zenke (Sebastian Koch), a specialist in security issues brought in from East Germany. Instead of following the evidence, Zenke is focused on pinning the crime on the local Jewish community leaders. Hakl is a classic *film noir* protagonist, following the truth no matter how painful. As he learns Zenke's story – and what is expected of him by their superiors – he discovers that truth is the least important item on the Communist agenda.

Trojan is apparently a highly regarded Czech actor, and is superb here. American audiences are likely to recognize Koch from "The Lives of Others" and "Black Book" and possibly some of his recent Hollywood appearances such as "A Good Day to Die Hard." Their cat-and-mouse game is never anything less than fascinating.

Kudos to JewishFilm.2013 for another fascinating lineup. Even the Movie Maven wishes he had time for them all.

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The National Center for Jewish Film's
16TH ANNUAL FILM FESTIVAL
APRIL 10 - 21

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