

Here's What to Expect at the 30th Anniversary of JFilm

Throughout the Jewish film festival's 11-day run, attendees can catch 20 films at three cinemas across Pittsburgh, in addition to four virtual showings. The festival will also feature expert discussions, panels and more.

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(<https://www.pittsburghmagazine.com/content/uploads/2023/04/c/h/cinema-sabaya.png>)

"CINEMA SABAYA," ONE OF THE FILMS SELECTED FOR THIS YEAR'S JFILM FESTIVAL. COURTESY JFILM

What makes a film a Jewish film? Kathryn Spitz Cohan says she approaches this question with "esoteric and philosophical conversations" each year as she prepares for JFilm, Pittsburgh's Jewish Film Festival.

It might be the film's thematic elements, the makeup of the cast or even just a single line in reference to Jewish culture. This year, Spitz Cohan, the executive director of [Film Pittsburgh](https://filmpittsburgh.org/) (<https://filmpittsburgh.org/>), says the 30th-anniversary JFilm lineup includes more Holocaust stories than years prior.

"I just wonder what that's about," Spitz Cohan wonders. "Is it because Holocaust survivors are passing on and so every filmmaker is rushing to tell their story? Or is it because antisemitism is on the rise?"

JFilm runs April 20-30 and will feature the local premieres for 24 films. (<https://filmpittsburgh.org/pages/jfilm>) Guests can attend 20 in-person showings across three cinemas, as well as four virtual showcases, over the 11-day festival. Other events include luncheons, conversations with experts and panel discussions.

Last year, still shrugging off the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic, the festival was limited to three in-person showings at one movie theater. This year, attendees can catch films at AMC Waterfront, the Oaks Theater and CMU's McConomy Auditorium.

Spitz Cohan says the 2018 synagogue massacre casts a lasting shadow on the city of Pittsburgh and its Jewish population, and the JFilm lineup aims to show the artistic response to the shooting.

"The conversation continues — and Pittsburgh once again shows that good has to come out of hatred and evil," Spitz Cohan says. "Good has to come out of that. So that's what we and many, many others in the city continue to work on."

The documentary "The [Cure for Hate](https://filmpittsburgh.org/films/the-cure-for-hate) (<https://filmpittsburgh.org/films/the-cure-for-hate>)" tells the story of Tony McAleer, a former Skinhead and Holocaust denier who later founded the anti-hate nonprofit Life After Hate. Decades into his redemptive journey, the film narrows in on McAleer's trip to Auschwitz where he witnesses the ravages of fascism under the Third Reich.

Spitz Cohan also says to look out for "[Finding Light](https://filmpittsburgh.org/films/finding-light) (<https://filmpittsburgh.org/films/finding-light>)," which tells the story of a Holocaust survivor's time in three death camps. The film's director, Paul Michael Bloodgood, actually performed in an original ballet production, "Light / The Holocaust and Humanity Project," from which the film draws inspiration.

McAleer, Bloodgood and many more will be featured in various speaker panels. Additionally, in partnership with the University of Pittsburgh, two films during the closing weekend will offer "intimate film Schmoozes," where attendees are invited to join guided discussions led by experts.

The full lineup can be viewed here (<https://filmpittsburgh.org/jfilm/films>), along with ticket pricing and details of other events.

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