



The Jewish News
of Northern California

FILM

Silicon Valley Jewish Film Fest includes movie with Israeli and Iranian co-directors

BY **MAYA MIRSKY** | SEPTEMBER 26, 2025



"Tatami" tells the story of an Iranian athlete asked to fake an injury to avoid an Israeli opponent. (Courtesy SVJFF)

The Silicon Valley Jewish Film Festival returns this year with both in-person and streaming films that run the gamut from comedic to heart-wrenching.

SVJFF executive director Tzvia Shelef urges people to come especially for the Israeli and international selections — films that they might not otherwise get a chance to see in a typical movie theater or film festival.

SVJFF 2025 Festival Trailer



She also emphasized the importance of supporting Jewish and Israeli content of all kinds in an atmosphere that has become increasingly inhospitable.

“It’s very upsetting,” she said. “That’s why I’m asking for people to really watch and enjoy because this may be the only place they’ll get to see it.”

More than 5,000 actors and filmmakers, including Joaquin Phoenix, Susan Sarandon, Cynthia Nixon, Debra Winger and Mark Ruffalo, have signed an **open letter** since Sept. 9 from Film Workers for Palestine that pledges a boycott of the Israeli film industry. The Silicon Valley film fest, which runs from Oct. 19 to Nov. 2, will host five live screenings at the Oshman Family JCC in Palo Alto plus 25 online options, some with additional content such as pre-recorded interviews with filmmakers.

Now in its **34th year**, the in-person side of the festival opens on Oct. 19 with “Tatami,” a 2023 black-and-white film with Israeli and Iranian co-directors.

Tatami Trailer #1 (2025)



In the film, Leila, an Iranian athlete, is forced to make a difficult choice at the world judo championships when she's asked to fake an injury in order to avoid facing an Israeli opponent.

"I'm extremely excited about the opening night because it's the first time ever that an Israeli director works with an Iranian director," Shelef said. "It's based on a true story about judo that happened many years ago."

Co-director Guy Nattiv, an Israeli who lives in the U.S., won an Oscar in 2019 for short live-action film. Co-director and actress Zar Amir-Ebrahimi, an Iranian who lives in France, won the Cannes best actress award in 2022. Amir-Ebrahimi also stars in the film as Leila's coach.

The filmmakers know this is an unusual combination.

"I think we need this type of friendship more than ever, especially between us and the Israeli people," Amir-Ebrahimi said in an interview with Variety in June when the film was released in the U.S.

The showing will be followed by a panel discussion with Nattiv and producer Jaime Ray Newman, who is also his wife.

"Tatami" is the first of the festival's in-person screenings.

Oct. 20 brings a double bill to the JCC. Movie-goers can first watch “My Neighbor Adolf,” a Colombian comedy set in the 1960s about a Polish Holocaust survivor who is convinced his new neighbor is Hitler in hiding. That’s followed by the Israeli film “Bliss,” a tender domestic drama that explores the lives of a 73-year-old Israeli and his second wife.

On Nov. 1, the fest will show “Charles Grodin: Rebel with a Cause,” followed by Q&A with director James Freedman and Marion Grodin, daughter of the late actor and comedian.

Closing the in-person part of the fest will be “Midas Man,” which dramatizes the life of “fifth Beatle” Brian Epstein, the band’s manager. The Nov. 2 screening will include a panel with actors Blake Richardson and Jonah Lees.

The online component includes 25 films, some followed by pre-recorded interviews created especially for the film festival, Shelef said. For example, “Diane Warren: Relentless,” a documentary about the award-winning songwriter, will be followed by an interview with her.

After the online showing of “A Letter to David,” director Tom Shoal will discuss how he created the film, which is about David Cunio, an Israeli who has been held hostage by Hamas in Gaza since Oct. 7, 2023, and his twin brother, Eitan Cunio.

Both brothers, who are from Kibbutz Nir Oz, acted for Shoval in an earlier film called “Youth.” The twins’ younger brother, Ariel Cunio, also remains in captivity in Gaza.

Shelef said the online films won’t be shown at the JCC during the festival — and vice-versa — but both types of screenings have been popular with attendees in previous years.

Silicon Valley Jewish Film Festival. Oct. 19-Nov. 2. Oshman Family JCC, 3921 Fabian Way, Palo Alto. Also online. svjff.org