



"The Imported Bridegroom" chronicles early 20th century life.

A Jewish snapshot

Film on Boston life now on DVD

By Daniel M. Kimmel

The DVD release of Pamela Berger's 1989 film, "The Imported Bridegroom," means that viewers can enjoy one of the most charming independent movies ever made about Jewish life in Boston. It's not like there's a lot of competition

Movie Maven

in the category, but it's a film to be savored nonetheless.

Based on a story by the famed editor of the Forward, Abe Cahan, it moves the action to Boston as Asriel Stroon (Eugene Troobnick) considers what he has accomplished in life. He's come from the old country and made his fortune as a landlord. He goes on a nostalgic visit back to Russia (with his shtetl played by the Plimoth Plantation), and finds a young scholar named Shia (Avi Hoffman). He sees Shia not only as a match for his daughter Flora (Greta Cowan), but as his own ticket into the afterlife. By supporting a scholar he believes he will wash away his own sins, and since Flora is an only child, Shia will become the son who will say Kaddish for him when he's gone.

But Asriel's plans don't work out quite as expected. For one thing, Flora wants an American husband – a doctor or businessman – not a Talmudic scholar. For another, when Shia starts learning English he starts learning goyish knowledge as well. Suddenly exposed to the world outside the shtetl, he becomes a one-man argument for the Enlightenment.

"The Imported Bridegroom" is not only a sweet romance – as Shia and Flora slowly find com-

mon ground – but a snapshot of Jewish life in America at the turn of the last century. The tension between assimilation and staying within the fold played out then in ways that are still reverberating today.

The film is especially interesting for Boston-area viewers, with scenes set on Beacon Hill and around town, and writer-director Berger's own home in Cambridge serving as the Stroon household. (These and other tidbits are explored in a featurette on the making of the film included on the DVD.) Rabbi Moshe Waldoks – in his pre-rabbi days – served as a dialogue coach and pops up in the small but pivotal role of Reb Lippe, with whom Asriel vies during his visit to his old village.

The late Eugene Troobnick is touching as the man looking out not only for his daughter, but his place in the afterlife. The rest of the cast gets the job done, particularly Hoffman and Cowan as the old-fashioned would-be bridegroom and the modern reluctant bride.

The release of the film on DVD means that this indie gem – which played local arthouses nearly two decades ago and might have been forgotten – can be enjoyed by generations to come.

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"The Imported Bridegroom" is available through the National Center for Jewish Film for \$36. Call (781) 736-8600 or visit www.jewishfilm.org.