



The National Center for Jewish Film Rutenberg and Everett Yiddish Film Library

YIDDISH FILM, VIDEO & DVD

The National Center For Jewish Film is the world leader in the revival of Yiddish cinema & the **ONLY SOURCE** for RESTORED Yiddish language films.

Yiddish Feature Films

American Matchmaker (Amerikaner Shadkhn)

USA, 1940, 87 min, b&w (35mm/16mm)

Yiddish w/ English subtitles

Director/Producer: Edgar G. Ulmer

Restoration: The National Center For Jewish Film

DVD/VHS \$72

MUSICAL

NEW ON DVD



Leo Fuchs, the "Yiddish Fred Astaire," stars in this musical comedy as Nat Silver, a debonair and fabulously wealthy Jewish-American businessman whose recent engagement (his eighth) goes awry. Edgar G. Ulmer's last Yiddish movie was also his most modern, an art deco romantic comedy about male ambivalence and Jewish assimilation. With its urbane, neurotic hero, *American Matchmaker* looks ahead to the films of Woody Allen. Also directed by Edgar Ulmer: *Green Fields*, *The Light Ahead*, and *The Singing Blacksmith*.

"As in the best Yiddish theater traditions, there is a successful combination of humor and schmaltz with the sentimentality at the end well-earned by the comic insights along the way...None is more charming than *American Matchmaker*. The title says it all – a clash between the urbane, slick manners of the new country and the old, busybody communal ways of the *shtetl*." - Films, Museum of Fine Arts,

Houston (1983)

With

I Want to Be A Boarder

USA, 1937, 15 min, b&w, Yiddish w/ English subtitles

DVD extras: Program Notes by J. Hoberman; Ulmer Biography; Leo Fuchs Interview

The Cantor's Son (Dem Khazns Zundl)

USA, 1937, 90 min, b&w (35mm)

Yiddish w/ English subtitles

Director: Ilya Motyleff (& Sidney Goldin, uncredited)

Restoration & New English Subtitles:
The National Center For Jewish Film

DVD \$72

NEW ON DVD

MUSICAL

New Restoration



This Yiddish feature film musical drama marks the screen debut of singer and cantor Moishe Oysher. Shot in Pennsylvania near the Pocono Mountains, the film features Oysher in the title role of a wayward youth who makes his way from his Polish *shtetl* to New York's Lower East Side (the film includes rare glimpses of the Lower East Side and of 2nd Avenue Yiddish theater marquees of the period). While washing floors in a nightclub several years later he is "discovered" and becomes a well-known singer. Ultimately, Oysher's character returns home to the Old Country and reunites with his parents and his childhood sweetheart.

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In his book on Yiddish cinema, *Bridge of Light*, critic J. Hoberman calls *The Cantor's Son* an "anti-Jazz Singer," further remarking that the film's story parallels Oysher's own struggle to reconcile his cantorial calling with a career in show business. Like his film character, Oysher, born in Bessarabia the son and grandson of cantors, was both a matinee idol and a celebrated cantor. Oysher was married to his *The Cantor's Son* co-star Florence Weiss. Also starring Moishe Oysher: *Overture to Glory*, and *The Singing Blacksmith*. See also *Great Cantors*. Also directed by Sidney M. Goldin: *A Cantor on Trial, East and West, The Feast of Passover, Uncle Moses*, and *Yizkor*.

"A deft combination of comedy, romance and outstanding music, this new Jewish picture will appeal tremendously to the Jewish fans. A fine cast, well-done story and deft direction, combined with an unusually beautiful musical score make this one of the most outstanding Jewish pictures produced in this country" - *Film Daily* (Dec. 1937)

Benya Krik

USSR, 1926, 90 min, b&w (35mm)

Silent w/ English intertitles

Director: V. Vilner

🌐 Restoration: The National Center For Jewish Film



The steamy Jewish underworld of Odessa is the setting for Isaac Babel's story based on the life of gangster king Mishka Yaponchik "Mike the Jap" Vinnitsky. Murder is a way of life for Benya and his gang. They profit from their criminal activities until the Russian Revolution and the local commissar assigns them to an "emergency revictualing patrol," making them a "revolutionary" regiment, complete with tattooed red stars. But this new post backfires for Benya as he finds himself ensnared in a Bolshevik trap.

"[*Benya Krik*] not only presented its swaggering hero as the victim of the Bolshevik regime but risked accusations of anti-Semitism by Jews as criminal profiteers...Opening in Kiev in early 1927, *Benya Krik* was almost immediately banned by the Ukrainian office for political education." - J. Hoberman, *The Village Voice*

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DVD \$72
 NEW ON DVD

Catskill Honeymoon

USA, 1949, 93 min, b&w (16mm)

English & Yiddish (no subtitles)

Director: Josef Berne

DVD/VHS \$54

MUSICAL

COMEDY



A Jewish resort hotel celebrates a pair of longtime customers' 50th wedding anniversary by staging an old-fashioned Borscht Belt show replete with singers, dancers, comedians, and impressionists. Filmed on location at Young's Gap Hotel in Parksville, New York, the film includes glimpses of the golf course, tennis matches, calisthenics classes, and sunbathers. The film's final act "Songs of Israel" hails the new state (founded a year before the film's release) with fervor and joy.

After World War II, Catskill vacationers who were fleeing the long hot summer of New York City started demanding more recreational activities. To answer this need and to stimulate business, resort owners were obliged to move into the entertainment business. *Catskill Honeymoon* is a period piece offering a fun glimpse of the legendary Catskills and Borscht Belt.

The Dybbuk (Der Dibuk)

Poland, 1937, 123 min, b&w (35mm/16mm)

Yiddish w/ English subtitles

Director: Michal Waszynski

🌐 Restoration & New English Subtitles:
 The National Center For Jewish Film

VHS \$90

Boundaries separating the natural from the supernatural dissolve as ill-fated pledges, unfulfilled passions, and untimely deaths ensnare two families in a tragic labyrinth of spiritual possession. *The Dybbuk* is based on the celebrated play of the same name by S. Ansky written during the turbulent years of 1912-1917 and inspired by Ansky's ethnographic research of Jews living in the Polish-Russian countryside just before World War I.

The Dybbuk reflects Ansky's deep perception of the *shtetl's* religious and cultural mores, as well as his insightful appreciation of its hidden spiritual resources. The film's exquisite musical and dance interludes evoke the cultural richness of both pre-World War II *shtetl* communities and Polish Jewry on the eve of World War II. The film was made on

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location in Poland in 1937 and brought together the best talents of Polish Jewry—script writers, composers, choreographers, set designers, actors and historical advisors.



"... one of the most solemn attestations to the mystic powers of the spirit the imagination has ever purveyed to the film reel." - Parker Tyler, *Classics of the Foreign Film*

"...the most ambitious Yiddish movie of its day... In fact, *The Dybbuk* is a time capsule... Drama intensifies a given moment, film freezes it. Whatever the movie's original intentions, events have dictated that its themes will be read as harbingers of exile and oblivion." - J. Hoberman, *Bridge of Light: Yiddish Film Between Two Worlds*

East and West (Mizrekh un Mayrev/Ost und West)

Austria 1923 85 min b&w (16mm)

Silent w/ English & Yiddish intertitles

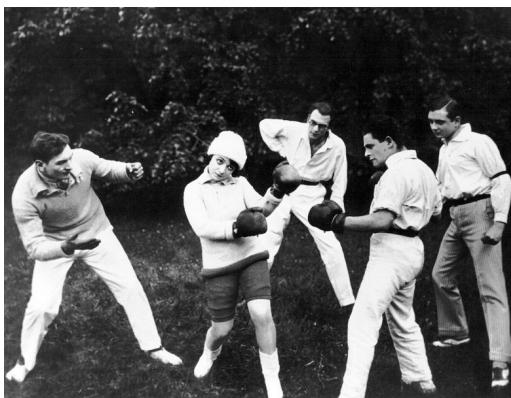
Directors: Sidney M. Goldin & Ivan Abramson

DVD/VHS Music Score (1991): Henry Sapoznik

🌐 Restoration: The National Center For Jewish Film

DVD/VHS \$72

NEW ON DVD



This delightful comedy opens as Morris Brown, a New York gambler acquainted more with his checkbook than his prayer book, returns to

Galicia with his very American daughter, Mollie (Molly Picon) for a family wedding. The bride, daughter of his religiously observant brother, and Mollie, whose exuberant antics fill the film, could not be more different. But Mollie unexpectedly meets her match, an engaging young yeshiva scholar who forsakes tradition and joins the secular world to win her heart.

East and West features classic scenes of Molly Picon lifting weights and boxing, teaching young villagers to shimmy, and stealing away from services to gorge herself before sundown on Yom Kippur. Underlying these hijinks is veteran filmmaker Goldin's affectionate portrayal of worldly Jews encountering traditional *shtetl* life. Also directed by Sidney M. Goldin: *A Cantor on Trial*, *The Cantor's Son*, *East and West*, *The Feast of Passover*, and *Uncle Moses*. Also starring Molly Picon: *Mamele* and *Yiddle With His Fiddle*.

"There are many scenes that allow Ms. Picon to shine. With her big, laughing eyes and her Clara Bow mouth, she is most appealing... The film... effectively contrasts the lifestyles of the two families and can be used to stimulate a lively discussion about assimilation and Jewish values." - *Medium* (No. 30 Winter 1984)

God, Man and Devil (Got, Mensch, un Taybl)

USA, 1949, 100 min, b&w (16mm)

Yiddish w/ English subtitles

Director: Joseph Seiden

🌐 Restoration: The National Center For Jewish Film

DVD/VHS \$54

NEW ON DVD



Based on a play by Jacob Gordin, *God, Man and Devil* centers on a wager between God and Satan that has dire consequences. Beware, the film cautions, when money sounds sweeter than music. Those who win lotteries stand to lose all, including their spiritual treasures, families, and religion.

Poor, pious Torah scribe Hershele Dubrovner has a life that glorifies God until Satan, disguised as a business partner, turns him into a greedy, dishonest factory owner whose success desecrates both his religion and his community. Betrayal and abandonment replace serenity and familiarity, and the instruments of good fortune become instruments of death. Not even music, previously Hershele's joy, can

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heal these rifts. Also by filmmaker Joseph Seiden: *I Want to Be a Boarder*, *The Living Orphan*, *Love and Sacrifice*, *Motel the Operator*, and *The Yiddish King Lear*.

"... an all-star version of Jacob Gordin's *God, Man and Devil* was likely the costliest production of Seiden's career, and, thanks to his choice of material, also the best." - J. Hoberman, *Bridge of Light: Yiddish Film Between Two Worlds*

Green Fields (Grine Felder)

USA, 1937, 95 min, b&w (35mm/16mm)

Yiddish w/ English subtitles

Directors: Edgar G. Ulmer & Jacob Ben-Ami

🌐 Restoration & New English Subtitles:
The National Center For Jewish Film

- **Best Foreign Film in France 1938**



The most critically acclaimed and beloved of American Yiddish talkies, Edgar Ulmer's soulful, open-air adaptation of Peretz Hirshbein's classic play heralded the Golden Age of Yiddish cinema. *Green Fields* celebrates an idyllic world of tribal wholeness and innate piety—no other movie has ever represented the *shtetl* with such lyricism. When an ascetic young scholar ventures into the Lithuanian countryside, searching for the city of "true Jews," he learns some unexpected lessons from the Jewish peasants who take him in as a boarder and tutor for their children. Also directed by Edgar Ulmer: *The American Matchmaker*, *The Light Ahead*, and *The Singing Blacksmith*. Also starring Helen Beverly: *The Light Ahead*, and *Overture to Glory*.

"The cast is brilliant...The direction by Jacob Ben-Ami and Edgar G. Ulmer has caught the beauty and poetry of the classic work and transferred it to the screen in a masterful manner." - *The Film Daily* (20 Oct. 1937)

DVD/VHS \$72
NEW ON DVD

"Sunlit and air-filled, yet suffused with yearning, the film recalls Renoir and Vigo... It exudes a dreamy pantheism..." - J. Hoberman, *Bridge of Light: Yiddish Film Between Two Worlds*

🕒 **DVD extras:** Program Notes by J. Hoberman; Peter Bogdanovitch Interview with Ulmer; Cast Interview; Ulmer Biography

Great Cantors of the Golden Age / 2 DVD SET

Great Cantors in Cinema

\$49.95

MUSICAL

USA, 2006, 120 min, b&w/color

Hebrew, Yiddish & English w/ English subtitles

Director: Rich Pontius; Producer: Cantor Murray E. Simon



The long-awaited re-release of NCJF's most popular titles, these two films feature some of the rarest and finest performances of renowned cantors from 1910 to the 1940s. *Great Cantors of the Golden Age* includes highlights from Yiddish filmmaker Joseph Seiden's 1931 film *The Voice of Israel* with performances by Adolph Katchko, Josef "Yossele" Rosenblatt, David Roitman, Joseph Shlisky, and Mordechai Hershman. *Great Cantors in Cinema's* film excerpts include: Yossele Rosenblatt in *Dream of My People* (1933), Moshe Koussevitsky in *We Who Remain* (1946), Mordechai Hershman in *The Voice of Israel* (1931), Moishe Oysher in *Overture to Glory* (1940) and Louis "Leibele" Waldman in *A Cantor on Trial* (1931).

🕒 **DVD extras include seven additional cantorial pieces:**

"Oshamnu Mikol Om" by David Roitman; "Kol Nidre" by Adolph Katchko; "Anenu" and "Shabbat Kiddush" (conclusion) by Moishe Oysher; "ViY'rushalayim Ircho" by Moshe Koussevitsky; "Yarzeit" and "Yiddishe Mamma" by Yossele Rosenblatt.

His Excellency (Yevo Prevoshoditelstvo) VHS \$72

aka Seeds of Freedom

USSR, 1928, 76 min, b&w (35mm/16mm)

Silent w/ English intertitles (Incomplete: missing one reel)

Director: Grigori Roshal

🌐 Restoration: The National Center For Jewish Film

According to director Grigori Roshal, the subject matter of this feature film was so delicate that the Soviet Commissar of Enlightenment oversaw production of *His Excellency* personally. The film is based on

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the life of Hirsch Lekert, a shoemaker and militant Jewish Labor Bund member, who attempted to assassinate the Vilna governor in 1902 to avenge the flogging of workers who participated in a May Day rally. Although the film was intended "as a tract against individualism, a greater emphasis is placed on class struggle within the Jewish community." Bourgeois Jewish Zionists find themselves pitted against fellow Jewish proletariats and the government.

His Excellency was the first Soviet-Jewish film produced after the Central Committee's Department for Agitprop demanded that fictional films be made "...in a way that can be appreciated by millions." In the tradition of brilliant Soviet directors Eisenstein and Pudovkin, *His Excellency* features stylized cinematography and stars Leonid Leonidov, a star of the Moscow Art Theater, and, in a small part, Nikolai Cherkasov, who would later play the title roles in Eisenstein's *Alexander Nevsky* and *Ivan the Terrible*. The cast includes J. Untershlak and Tamara Edelman as Hirsh and Rivele Lekert, and the Moscow Art Theater's Leonid Leonidov as both the Tsar's governor and the community's rabbi.

Jewish Luck

VHS \$72

(Yevreiskoye Schastye/Menakhem Mendl)

USSR, 1925, 100 min, b&w (35mm/16mm)

Silent w/ English intertitles (Russian intertitles available)

Director: Alexander Granovsky

🌐 Restoration: The National Center For Jewish Film



Jewish Luck was among the first Soviet Yiddish films to be released in the United States during the 1920s. Based on Sholem Aleichem's stories featuring the character Menakhem Mendl, *Jewish Luck* revolves around Mendl's daydreaming entrepreneur who specializes in doomed strike-it-rich schemes. Despite Jewish oppression by Tsarist Russia, Mendl continues to pursue his dreams and his continued persistence transforms him from *schlemiel* to hero as the film uncovers the tragic underpinnings of Aleichem's comic tales. Notes *Village Voice* critic Georgia Brown, "The movie's best intertitle, translated from Isaac Babel's Russian: 'What can you do when there is nothing to do?'"

Jewish Luck director Alexander Granovsky, first staged a dramatized version of the Mendl stories at the Moscow Yiddish State Theater. The film features the work of some of Soviet Jewry's best artists, and Eduard Tissé's cinematography presages his later groundbreaking work in Sergei Eisenstein's *The Battleship Potemkin*. Author of the original Russian intertitles, Soviet Jewish writer Isaac Babel, later fell victim to the Stalinist purges in the late 1930s.

Jolly Paupers (Freylekhe Kabtsonim)

Poland, 1937, 62 min, b&w (35mm/16mm)

Yiddish w/ English subtitles

Directors: Leon Jeannot & Z. Turkow

🌐 Restoration & New English Subtitles:
The National Center For Jewish Film

VHS \$72
MUSICAL
COMEDY



Jolly Paupers combines the talents of the Warsaw Art Players under the leadership of Zygmund Turkow. In this musical comedy, the famous comic duo Dzigan and Shumacher play two small town "entrepreneurs" who believe they have struck oil in a local field. The whole town finds out and thus begins a comedy of errors, including millionaire investors, American schemers, and insane asylums (not to mention a little matchmaking on the side).

In the years preceding the outbreak of World War II, the Dzigan and Shumacher Comedy Revue Theatre gained immense popularity. Their satirical monologues and skits provided Jewish audiences with an escape and a rare opportunity to laugh. Other Dzigan and Shumacher comedies: *Our Children* and *Without a Home*.

"The film has its charm, especially in a delightful comic sequence when the pair are declared insane...It's all silly fun." - Dan Kimmel, *Variety*

"A low-budget satire of *shtetl* mores...*Jolly Paupers* is the closest the screen came to a Yiddish cabaret sensibility: irreverent, mordant, and consciously theatrical." - J. Hoberman, *Bridge of Light: Yiddish Film Between Two Worlds*

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**Laughter Through Tears (Skvoz Slezy) DVD/VHS \$72
aka Through Tears NEW ON DVD**

USSR, 1928, 92 min, b&w (35mm/16mm)

Silent w/ English intertitles

Director: Grigori Gricher-Cherikover

🌐 Restoration: The National Center For Jewish Film



Director Grigori Gricher-Cherikover leavens pathos with humor in this earthy portrait of pre-revolutionary *shtetl* life based on the Sholem Aleichem stories, "Motl Peysi" and "The Enchanted Tailor." In the film, Motl's father dies, leaving him to survive on his own in a changing world while the tailor Shimen-Elye buys a she-goat which mysteriously changes gender each time its new owner stops at the inn between Kozodoyevka, where he purchased the creature.

In accord with Soviet official policies against anti-semitism (which were always as odds with prevailing popular sentiments), Gricher-Cherikover emphasizes the poverty and repression of Jews under Tsarist rule. He celebrates his actors, particularly child actor Moshele Silberman—drawn from the Moscow Art Theater—through close attention to facial expression and gesture.

A sound version of the film opened on 19 November 1933 at the Acme Theater in New York City, where it was held over for six weeks due to its extreme popularity. Actor George Jessel said, "I enjoyed every minute. It is a classic, you will rave about it!"

**A Letter to Mother (A Brivele der Mamen) VHS \$72
aka The Eternal Song**

Poland, 1939, 106 min, b&w (35mm/16mm)

Yiddish w/ English subtitles

Directors: Joseph Green & Leon Trystand

🌐 Restoration: The National Center For Jewish Film

A Letter to Mother's tale of family disintegration and poverty serves as a metaphor for the displacements facing European Jews in 1939. One

of the last Yiddish films made in Poland before the Nazi invasion, the film tells the story of a mother's persistent efforts to support her family. While her husband lives in America, Dobrish struggles to care for her three children in pre-World War II Polish Ukraine. After her family is pulled apart by severe poverty and the turmoil of war, Dobrish and her family make their way to New York and turn to the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society in search of a brighter future.



Released on 14 September 1939, two weeks after the German blitzkrieg over Poland, this film opened to packed audiences at the Belmont Theater in New York. Hailed by the *New York Times* as one of the best Yiddish films to reach America, *A Letter to Mother* was the highest grossing Yiddish film of its time. According to author J. Hoberman, *A Letter to Mother*, director Joe Green's last film, was also his "favorite from among his own films [and it] may convey something of the flavor of Green's childhood." Also directed by Joseph Green: *Mamele*, *Yiddle With His Fiddle*.

**The Light Ahead
aka Fishke the Lame**

**DVD/VHS \$72
NEW ON DVD**

USA, 1939, 94 min, b&w (35mm/16mm)

Yiddish w/ English subtitles

Director: Edgar G. Ulmer

🌐 Restoration & New English Subtitles:
The National Center For Jewish Film

This unique film adaptation of 19th century social satirist Medele Mokher Seformim's stories, *The Light Ahead* is possibly the greatest of Edgar G. Ulmer's *shtetl* films. Here, the director counterpoints his pastoral *Green Fields* to criticize the poverty and superstition that oppress a pair of star-crossed lovers. Made on the eve of World War II, *The Light Ahead* is at once romantic, expressionist, and painfully conscious of the danger about to engulf European Jews.

Impoverished and disabled lovers Fishke and Hodel dream of life in the big city of Odessa, free from the poverty and stifling old-world prejudices of the *shtetl*. The benevolent and enlightened bookseller Mendele helps them, turning small-town superstitions to their advantage. A story of love frustrated by small-town ignorance, this luminous allegory of escape marries Edgar Ulmer's masterful direction

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with superb acting by members of New York's Artef and Yiddish Art theaters. Also directed by Edgar Ulmer: *The American Matchmaker*, *Green Fields*, and *The Singing Blacksmith*. Also starring Helen Beverley: *Green Fields* and *Overture to Glory*.



"A gem radiating warmth and honesty." – *Jewish Weekly*

"An astonishing artifact that is equal parts vaudeville *shtick*, Talmudic exegesis, and ghetto melodrama." - *Village Voice*

"Yiddish film producers will probably look to *The Light Ahead*...for their inspiration when new productions are under consideration. As well they might, for the film touches undreamed of heights." - *New York World Telegram* (23 Sept. 1939)

"Central to the film is a riveting performance by Helen Beverly as the blind orphan, Hodel...Beverly and Opatoshu are perhaps the most beautiful couple in the history of Yiddish cinema, and their scenes have a touching erotic chemistry." - J. Hoberman, *Bridge of Light: Yiddish Film Between Two Worlds*

DVD extras: Program Notes by J. Hoberman; Ulmer Biography; David Opatoshu Interview

The Living Orphan (Der Libediker Yusem) DVD/VHS \$72
aka My Sonny
 USA, 1939, 97 min, b&w (35mm) **NEW ON DVD**
New Restoration
 Yiddish w/ New English subtitles
 Director: Joseph Seiden
 Restoration & New English Subtitles:
 The National Center For Jewish Film

The Living Orphan is the story of a stage couple whose marriage is strained by life in the theater. Adapted from one of the best 2nd Avenue Yiddish Theatre domestic melodramas, director Joseph Seiden's

sentimental film is drawn from life in 1930s New York City. Also by director Joseph Seiden: *God, Man and Devil*, *I Want to Be a Boarder*, *Love and Sacrifice*, *Motel the Operator*, and *The Yiddish King Lear*



"...*The Living Orphan* is both a recording of a vanished landscape— Lower East Side streets, Second Avenue marquees, Romanian-style wine cellars—and a particular sensibility, as well as a two-hankie backstage domestic saga. In the opening scene, a pomaded radio singer croons his trademark ballad "Mayn Zundele" ("My Little Boy"). Its fondest wish—"May your pain be mine"—is abundantly fulfilled as his wife leaves their infant to seek her own fortune on the stage. Crudely made, and lovingly restored by the National Center for Jewish Film, *The Living Orphan* is a musical weepie in which the separated showbiz couple [played by] the Polish Yiddish actors Gustav Berger and Fania Rubina, a real-life couple who happened to be in New York in early 1939...The Yiddish term for *The Living Orphan* is *shund* (trash), and it's a generous example, offering something for everyone. Attractions include an orchestral tribute to America's "Eden on Earth," complete with battleship montage; the resident schlemiel is a crypto commie who jokes about Karl Marx and birth control. And then there is the sour, unintentional *shund* humor. No sooner has the footloose diva finished wowing the Bialy-stoker Home for the Aged with "Give Me Back My Child" than she is unexpectedly assaulted by her long-estranged mother-in-law. Pleased not to see 'the one who made [her] son unhappy,' the crone thanks God for making her blind." - J. Hoberman, *The Village Voice* (2006)

Long is the Road (Lang ist der Veg) VHS \$90
 US-Occupied Germany, 1948, 77 min, b&w (35mm/16mm)
 Yiddish, German & Polish w/ English subtitles
 Directors: Herbert B. Fredersdorf & Marek Goldstein
 Restoration & New English Subtitles:
 The National Center For Jewish Film

- *Spirit of Freedom Award, Jerusalem Film Festival (1996)*

Based on an idea and script by Israel Becker, this is the first feature film to represent the Holocaust from a Jewish perspective. Made by and about Jewish displaced persons, the film was shot on location at

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Landsberg, the largest DP camp in U.S.-occupied Germany. Effectively mixing neorealist and expressionist styles, the film follows a Polish Jew (played by Israel Becker, one of the founders of the first professional Yiddish theater company in postwar Germany) and his family from the thriving Jewish community of prewar Warsaw through the horrors of Auschwitz to the frustrations and instability of refugee life in the DP camps. The film culminates with the emergence of a hope for rebirth and renewal in Israel. See also: *The Balcony*.



"...works brilliantly.... little-known classic... a...marvel" - Ellen Cohn, *The Jewish Week* (1996)

"...something that no film in the five decades since has been able to recapture...." - Dave Kehr, *New York Daily News* (1996)

Love and Sacrifice (Libe und Laydnshaft) VHS \$72

USA, 1936, 76 min, b&w (35mm)

Yiddish w/ English subtitles

Director: George Roland

🌐 Restoration & New English Subtitles:
The National Center For Jewish Film

Based on the novel *Love and Passion* by Isidore Zolotarefsky, *Love and Sacrifice* is a prime example of "shund," the melodramatic theatrical escapist entertainment of the Yiddish theater. It opened at the Clinton Theater 7 April 1936 and was held over three weeks as the most popular Yiddish movie the Clinton had shown to date.

Produced by Joseph Seiden over two days in a loft in New York City on a miniscule budget, this tale of a middle-class matron who shoots the man who compromises her was a tremendous success. This story of a long-suffering mother who goes to prison for shooting a would-be suitor employs many archetypes of Yiddish theater. From the conflict between the sacrificing mother and the homewrecking schemer, to the reunion of parent and child at a celebratory wedding, the film provides a classic example of the Yiddish-American cinema. Also by filmmaker

Joseph Seiden: *God, Man and Devil, I Want to Be a Boarder, The Living Orphan, Motel the Operator, and The Yiddish King Lear*



"You'll see a tender yet mighty picture drama. Hot with a living breath of a story of old as the ages, new as tomorrow!" - Seiden's advertising copy for the film

"...in the movie there is what to make you cry and what to make you laugh. The women, wives and even young girls, weep openly with the heroine..." - J. P. Katz, *Jewish Daily Forward*

Mamele (Little Mother)

Poland, 1938, 100 min, b&w (16mm)

Yiddish w/ English subtitles

Directors: Joseph Green & Konrad Tom

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DVD/VHS \$72
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MUSICAL
COMEDY



Mamele is a musical comedy that embraces the entire gamut of interwar Jewish life in Lodz in all its diversity with tenements and unemployed Jews, nightclubs and gangsters, and religious Jews celebrating Sukkot. But the film belongs to Molly Picon who romps undaunted through her dutiful daughter role, saving siblings, keeping the family intact, singing and acting her way through the stages of a woman's life from childhood to old age.

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Picon stars as Khavtshi, a young woman who promises her dying mother that she will take care of her family. She's so busy cooking, cleaning, and matchmaking for her brothers and sisters that she barely has any time for herself—until she discovers the violinist across the courtyard! The musical score also includes Picon's trademark theme song, "Abi Gezunt." Also starring Molly Picon: *East and West*, and *Yiddle With His Fiddle*. Also directed by Joseph Green: *A Letter to Mother*, and *Yiddle With His Fiddle*.

"Lot of fun and pleasant song numbers by Molly Picon...90 minutes of laughter." - *New York Times*

Mirele Efros

USA, 1939, 80 min, b&w (16mm)

Yiddish w/ English subtitles

Director: Joseph Berne

🌐 Restoration: The National Center For Jewish Film

Mirele Efros, "the Jewish Queen Lear," was the dramatic masterpiece of Ukrainian-born Jacob Gordin, an enormously influential Yiddish playwright whose works sought to describe and promulgate the ethos of *mentshlekhkeyt*: the practice of honesty, decency, and devotion toward family and community. This sophisticated version of his stage classic faithfully recreates Jewish life in turn-of-the-century Grodno, Poland.

Berta Gersten gives a memorable performance as Mirele, a wealthy and pious widow whose devotion to her children extends to hand-picking a wife for her eldest son, gravely mistaking the young woman's character as giving and devout. The resulting conflict between the noble Jewish matriarch and her ungrateful, self-serving daughter-in-law provides both a cautionary tale and a lesson in the value of filial piety.

"*Mirele Efros* is likely the single most widely played piece in the Yiddish theatrical canon." - J. Hoberman, *Bridge of Light: Yiddish Film Between Two Worlds*

Motel the Operator

USA, 1939, 88 min, b&w (35mm)

Yiddish w/ English subtitles

Director: Joseph Seiden

🌐 Restoration: The National Center For Jewish Film

Based on a play by Chaim Tauber, this classic melodrama captures the sentimental, emotional characters and the convoluted plots and fantastic coincidences which dominated the 2nd Avenue Yiddish theaters. Focusing on a labor dispute in the garment district of New York City, the film survives as an important historical document, highlighting the hardships of the Jewish immigrant experience in America.

Motl, a poor laborer, loving husband and new father, leads

cloakmakers in a strike for better working conditions. When he is severely injured by strikebreakers, his wife, Esther, and infant son are left destitute. Desperate to save her starving child, Esther gives up their child for adoption to a wealthy couple, and then commits suicide. The Film includes richly rendered, beautiful Yiddish songs by Sholem Secunda, featuring Cantor Leibele Waldman and Joel Feig's famous choir. Also by filmmaker Joseph Seiden: *God, Man and Devil*, *I Want to Be a Boarder*, *The Living Orphan*, *Love and Sacrifice*, and *The Yiddish King Lear*.



"A sorrowful and tragic melodrama in the best Yiddish tradition..." - *The Film Daily* (24 Jan. 1940)

Our Children (Unzere Kinder)

Poland, 1948, 68 min, b&w (35mm/16mm)

Yiddish w/ English subtitles

Directors: Natan Gross & Shaul Goskind

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In this, Poland's last Yiddish feature film, comedy duo [Shimon] Dzigal and [Yisroel] Shumacher play all the parts in a Sholem Aleichem story staged for an audience of children who survived the Holocaust. But the children outdo the performers when they exchange roles and demonstrate the healing, liberating powers of song, dance, and storytelling. With children from the JDC-supported Helenowek Colony. Also starring Dzigal and Shumacher: *Jolly Paupers* and *Without a Home*.

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"[*Our Children*] is not only among the first films about the Holocaust, it is also the first to critique its representation." - J. Hoberman, *Bridge of Light: Yiddish Film Between Two Worlds*

Overture to Glory (Der Vilner Balebes)

USA, 1940, 77 min, b&w (35mm/16mm)

Yiddish w/ English subtitles

Director: Max Nosseck

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Beginning with Rosh Hashanah and ending on Yom Kippur, this story of a Vilna cantor seduced by the opera resonates with the voice of Moishe Oysher, one of the best-known cantors of his day. Carefully lit cinematography, well-shaped dialogue, and Alexander Olshanetsky's musical score steer *Overture* clear of melodramatic excess. Based on the play *Der Vilner Balebes* by Mark Arnstein. Also starring Moishe Oysher: *The Cantor's Son*, and *The Singing Blacksmith*. See also *Great Cantors*. Also starring Helen Beverly: *The Light Ahead* and *Green Fields*.

"...one of the major events of the Jewish cinema...Moishe Oysher's voice is truly magnificent..." - *New York Post*

"The entire film is done with exquisite restraint...Moishe Oysher's acting and singing are excellent... the music is magnificent, the finest that Alexander Olshanetsky has ever written...truly an artistic and beautiful triumph of the Yiddish cinema..." - William Edline, *The Day (Der Tag)*

"Seldom has the Jewish faith been more nobly and beautifully espoused as it is in this film...A milestone in the course of Yiddish film making." - Robert W. Dana, *New York Herald Tribune*


The Return of Nathan Becker

(Nosn Beker Fort Aheym)

USSR, 1932, 85 min, b&w (35mm)

Yiddish & Russian w/ English subtitles

Directors: Boris Shpis, Rokhl M. Milman for Belgoskino

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The only Russian-Yiddish sound film produced in the Soviet Union, *The Return of Nathan Becker* glorifies Soviet industrial productivity as it denigrates American capitalism and assimilation. Famed Yiddish author and poet Peretz Markish wrote the screenplay for this film about bricklayer Nathan Becker who returns home to Russia after 20 years in America. The film depicts the *shtetl* way of life as primitive and grotesque and promotes a shift away from traditional Jewish values, reflecting the government's determined effort to reduce Jewish culture to "Communist in content and Yiddish in form only." Neither Markish nor actor Solomon Mikhoels (who was also director of the Moscow Yiddish State Theater) survived the Stalinist purges.

Seekers of Happiness

VHS \$72

Aka Birobidzhan, A Greater Promise

USSR, 1934, 84 min, b&w

Russian w/ English subtitles

Director: Vladimir Korsh-Sablin


During the 1920s, many impoverished Jews searching for a better life made their way to Birobidzhan, the Soviet Jewish Autonomous Region on the Chinese border. This melodrama tells the story of a Jewish family's immigration to Birobidzhan and their experiences as settlers on a collective farm in the area. While the family encounters hardships in adjusting to this new way of life (including son-in-law Pinya's greedy, misguided search for gold) the characters' assimilation is ultimately shown as positive. While this feature film was essentially a Soviet propaganda piece emphasizing the utopian dream of Birobidzhan as a socialist Jewish homeland, the reality of Birobidzhan's harsh and inhospitable environment was quite different.

The Singing Blacksmith (Yankl Der Schmid)

USA, 1938, 105 min, b&w (35mm)

Yiddish w/ English subtitles

Director: Edgar G. Ulmer

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Moishe Oysher, the renowned cantor and star of Yiddish radio, stars in Edgar G. Ulmer's musical version of David Pinski's play *Yankl der Schmid*, a classic 1906 drama by one of America's most significant Yiddish writers. Shot at a Catholic monastery in New Jersey, the film focuses on a tough, hard-drinking, womanizing blacksmith who is ultimately transformed into a good, hardworking husband by the love of a decent woman. The film's examination of the complex relationships of love, work, and passion make it a unique standout within the genre of Yiddish cinema. Singing and dancing, Oysher gives his most robust performance as a passionate *shtetl* blacksmith who must struggle against temptation to become a *mensch*. Recently rediscovered footage makes this the most complete extant version of Ulmer's lively folk operetta, replete with an example of Yiddish swing. Also directed by Edgar Ulmer: *The American Matchmaker*, *Green Fields*, and *The Light Ahead*. Also starring Moishe Oysher: *The Cantor's Son*, and *Overture to Glory*. See also *Great Cantors*.

"Sincerity and richly Jewish characters taken from the source." - Archer Winston, *New York Post*

"*The Singing Blacksmith* advances the art of the Yiddish film and adds to the gayety of Jewish life." - *Daily Worker*

"...bright, frequently thrilling entertainment." - *Brooklyn Eagle*

"...fine photography and good direction make the film an outstanding comedy-drama." - *Daily News*

➤ **DVD extras:** Program notes by J. Hoberman; Ulmer biography; *Singing in the Dark* trailer

Tevye

USA, 1939, 96 min, b&w (35mm/16mm)

Yiddish w/ English subtitles

Director/Producer/Screenplay: Maurice Schwartz

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- **FIRST NON-ENGLISH LANGUAGE FILM INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL FILM REGISTRY BY THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS (1991)**

Maurice Schwartz's adaptation of the classic Sholem Aleichem play centers on Khave, Tevye the Dairyman's daughter, who falls in love with Fedye, the son of a Ukrainian peasant. Her courtship and marriage pit Tevye's love for his daughter against his deep-seated faith and loyalty to tradition. The clash between tradition and modernity, parental authority and love, customs and enlightenment are foreshadowed by the anti-semitism of the rural community. Several scenes stand out: Khave showing her skeptical father the volume of Gorki given to her by her suitor; Tevye gently teaching Psalms to his grandchildren and reciting the Sabbath prayers; and Tevye mourning

the loss of his child to intermarriage. Filmed at the Underhill Farm just east of Jericho, Long Island. For Maurice Schwartz see also: *Uncle Moses*, *Unfortunate Bride*, and *Yizkor*.



"With all due respect to Zero Mostel and Topol in *Fiddler on the Roof*, it was Maurice Schwartz, the great Yiddish actor/director, who first showed Tevye the Dairyman in his full light as a *mensch* for all seasons. A rare opportunity to see Schwartz in what may have been his most magnificent role." - Judy Stone, *San Francisco Chronicle*

"The black and white print, rescued from nitrate, is gorgeous. It couldn't have looked much different when the film was released...Bravo" - Kirk Honeycutt, [Southern CA] *Daily News*

➤ **DVD extras:** Scenes from 2 of Schwartz's Yiddish feature films, *Yizkor* and *Uncle Moses*; program notes by J. Hoberman.

Two Sisters (Tsvey Shvester)

USA, 1938, 82 min, b&w (16mm)

Yiddish w/ English subtitles

Director: Ben K. Blake

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Is *Two Sisters* "domestic tragedy or new comedy"? We like to think of it as a "Jewish General Hospital." In any event, make sure there's a hanky nearby: The dying mother of two small daughters instructs Betty, the elder sister, to raise her younger sister Sally. Betty works tirelessly, supporting her sister through nursing school and her fiancée through medical school only to see her happiness shattered when her sister and fiancée fall in love. This family drama of personal sacrifice and devotion without end amidst the struggle to succeed in America provides a perfect vehicle for Jennie Goldstein, in her only preserved film appearance. The screenplay, which combines slapstick humor and deep pathos, is typical of the once-vibrant 2nd Avenue Yiddish theater and preserves Jennie Goldstein's only film appearance.

"The dual reading that *Tsvey Shvester* demands mirrors the mindset of its original audience. Eager to assimilate into American society (or more exactly, for their children to be assimilated), yet conscious of their own connection to a dying traditionalism, the Yiddish audience for the movie were part of [Irving] Howe's 'transitional generation,' stoically postponing gratification for the sake of their offspring. By presenting the psychic stresses of assimilation as an optimistic tragedy (or a grotesque comedy), *Tsvey Shvester* acknowledged the situation of this transitional generation with a directness that precludes escapism." - J. Hoberman, *Bridge of Light: Yiddish Film Between Two Worlds*

Uncle Moses

USA, 1932, 87 min, b&w (16mm)

Yiddish w/ English subtitles

Directors: Sidney Goldin & Aubrey Scotto

🌐 Restoration & New English Subtitles:
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When poverty and persecution compel his Polish landsmen to leave their *shtetl*, "Uncle" Moses, the crude and lusty former butcher, welcomes them to the promised land of his Lower East Side clothing factory. A master of the harsh new American system, with its 14-hour workday, Moses attempts to reconstruct the lost harmony of the *shtetl* community in the paternalistic order of his sweatshop.

Masha is the sweetheart of Charlie, a labor activist, trying to organize a union in Moses' factory. Moses courts Masha, who agrees to marry him in order to improve her family's desperate financial position. She bears his child but confesses she feels wretched because she did not listen to her heart and marry Charlie who had incited the workers to strike. This is the first Yiddish talkie engaged directly in the progressive currents of the day—political and aesthetic. Also directed by Sidney M. Goldin: *A Cantor on Trial*, *The Cantor's Son*, *East and West*, *The Feast of Passover*, and *Yizkor*. For Maurice Schwartz see also: *Teveye*, *Unfortunate Bride*, and *Yizkor*.

"Based on the novel by Sholem Asch, *Uncle Moses* stands as one of the finest examples of Yiddish cinema and is unique in its portrayal of a despotic Jewish factory boss who takes pleasure in seeing the "tables turned" by employing the former leaders and highly respected men of

his *shtetl* as sweatshop tailors. Uncle Moses is a harsh man who uses his wealth and power to fight against unionization of his shop (by a young idealistic Jew) and manipulate women, especially the daughters of his workers." - J. Hoberman, *Bridge of Light: Yiddish Film Between Two Worlds*



"Here is a chance to see one of the century's greatest actors (Maurice Schwartz) in a melodrama focusing on work and tenement life in the Lower East Side." - Georgia Brown, *The Village Voice*

"[*Uncle Moses*] is a symphony of contradictions, which Schwartz orchestrates brilliantly." - Richard Corliss, *Time*

The Unfortunate Bride

Reedited reissue of 1926 silent *Broken Hearts*

USA, 1932, 68 min, b&w (35mm)

Yiddish & English intertitles w/ music & sound sequences

Director/Star: Maurice Schwartz

🌐 Restoration: The National Center For Jewish Film
Maurice Schwartz's film directorial debut is a film within a film where a grandfather tells his grandchildren a cautionary tale about a Jewish political dissident writer who leaves his wife in Russia and heads for America, where he starts learning English begins a career as a journalist. When he learns from a friend that his wife has died in Russia, the writer becomes involved with a cantor's daughter and quickly experiences the new "value" system operating among some American Jews: the woman's parents do not approve of him because he is poor. This immigrant tale gets even more complicated when the first wife turns up and the cantor's daughter defies her parents by taking control of her own life decisions. For films starring or directed by Maurice Schwartz see also: *Teveye*, *Uncle Moses*, and *Yizkor*.

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A Vilna Legend (Dem Rebns Koyekh)

Reedited reissue of 1924 silent The Vow

USA, 1933, 60 min, b&w (16mm/35mm)

Yiddish narration w/ English subtitles

Director: Zygmund Turkow (1924 Credits)

Director: George Roland (1933 Credits)

🌐 Restoration & New English Subtitles:
The National Center For Jewish Film



Few reminders are left of the vibrant Yiddish theatrical world that flourished in Warsaw in the 1920s. This film is one of them. Jewish producers were preeminent in the interwar Polish film industry but, due to the pervasive anti-semitism of the early 1920s, they shied away from films dealing with Jewish themes. It was not until 1924 that amateurs Henryk Bojm and Leo Forbert adapted a Peretz Hirshbein play for the screen. Ambitiously mounted and professionally cast, *The Vow* was one of the most successful Jewish cinematic efforts undertaken up to that time. *Note: This film is distinct from The Vow (1937), also restored by NCJF.*

In 1933, a group of New York Yiddish actors decided to give the original 1924 gem, *The Vow*, a new lease on life. They added a sound narration and several new scenes (those in the tavern) which gave dramatic justification to the narrative form.

A precursor to the 1937 classic, *The Dybbuk*, *A Vilna Legend* features the same classic tale of frustrated love and destiny and the breaking/fulfillment of vows. A yeshiva student and an orphan girl who are deeply in love face eternal separation even though their parents promised them to each other before birth. Only the prophet Elijah's miraculous intervention allows their parents to fulfill their vow and the couple to find happiness together. The film stars real-life mother and daughter Ester-Rokhl Kaminska and Ida Kaminska, who also starred in *Without a Home*.

DVD/VHS \$72

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The Vow (Tkies Kaf)

Poland, 1937, 82 min b&w (35mm)

Yiddish w/ English subtitles

Director: Henryk Szabo

🌐 Restoration & New English Subtitles:
The National Center For Jewish Film



VHS \$72

Two friends make a sacred pact pledging their newborn children, Rachel and Mendel, in marriage. Years pass, Rachel's father dies, and the two children, knowing nothing of their fathers' pledge, meet for the first time and fall in love. But Mendel's father insists his son study at the Vilna Yeshiva, and Rachel's rich old landlord insists on marrying her.

Based on the same legend as S. Ansky's classic play *The Dybbuk*, this spirited film offers the divine intervention of Elijah and a happy ending. Made in 1937 on the eve of the Holocaust, *The Vow* captures authentic scenes of Jewish *shtetl* life, Yiddish love songs, and the clash between tradition and modernity. Yiddish theater diva Dina Halpern stars as Rachel. *Note: This film is distinct from The Vow (1924) which was reissued as A Vilna Legend (1933), also restored by NCJF.*

"A romantic and simple story, unfolded against a moving background of legendary and religious significance" - *The Film Daily*

The Wandering Jew (Der Vanderner Yid) DVD/VHS \$72

aka Abraham Our Patriarch, Jews in Exile,

NEW ON DVD

Nazi Terror, The Jew in Germany

USA, 1933, 66 min, b&w (35mm)

Yiddish w/ English subtitles

Director: George Roland

🌐 Restoration & New English Subtitles:
The National Center For Jewish Film

The Wandering Jew tells the story of Arthur Levi (Jacob Ben-Ami), a German-Jewish artist who experiences the new German anti-semitism when his masterpiece, a portrait of his Polish-born father, is rejected by the Berlin Academy of Art, which also asks for his resignation as professor. Later in the film, the figure in the painting comes to life and tells Levi the story of the persecution of the Jewish people. The film

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ends with footage of an anti-Hitler rally at New York City's Madison Square Garden and Levi's resolve to bear onward in the face of adversity.



The Wandering Jew is a unique find: the first American feature film to depict the situation of Jews in Nazi Germany and the only Yiddish-language film of its era to address this subject. The film, which dramatizes the situation of German Jews, was an American-Jewish response to the Nazi regime. It was produced by Jewish American Film Arts at the Atlas Studio on Long Island, New York, during the summer of 1933, just months after the Nazi rise to power in Germany. In the wake of the violence of *Kristallnacht* the film was given a December 1938 re-release under the title *Jews in Exile*, screening in RKO theaters all over the New York area.

"This graphic account of the tribulations of the Jewish people from the days of Pharaoh to those of Adolf Hitler, produced in New York, grips the spectator from start to finish. It is difficult to imagine a more crushing indictment of Nazism and all its works." - *The New York Times*

Where is My Child? (Vu iz Mayn Kind?) VHS \$72

USA, 1937, 92 min, b&w (16mm)

Yiddish w/ English subtitles

Directors: Abraham Leff & Harry Lynn

🌐 Restoration & New English Subtitles:
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Celia Adler, doyenne of the Yiddish stage, gives a haunting performance as the film's heroine who arrives in New York in 1911—at the height of mass Jewish immigration—newly widowed, friendless, impoverished and the mother of a newborn baby boy. Fearing that she cannot care for the child, she places him in an orphanage. She quickly regrets her decision, but it is too late as she finds herself tricked into the decision. Obsessed with the thought of reunion with him, she spends the next 25 years searching, pining, and bewailing her loss. The film is filled with the conventions of the popular Yiddish stage: a melodramatic plot centering on the rupture and restoration of family

ties; a comic subplot; songs; stereotyped characters; happy coincidences and happier endings. Above all, it was the theme of the pains and joys of the mother-son relationship, always idealized in the Jewish folk mind, which could be counted on to strike a responsive chord. All this was bound to be familiar to the film's first audiences.



"This film provides an insight into the concerns of Jews in the late thirties and their particular methods in playing out the reality of their situation, for whatever the numerous advantages of life in the United States, inevitably there was a price to be paid in terms of health, family ties and religion." - Mashey Bernstein, *Kansas City Jewish Chronicle*

Without a Home (On a Heym)

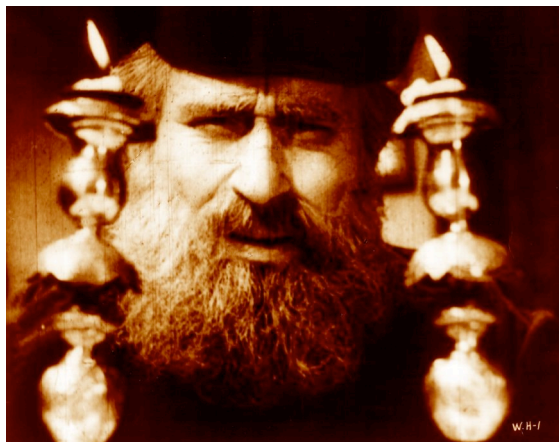
Poland, 1939, 88 min, b&w (16mm)

Yiddish w/ English subtitles

Director: Alexander Martin

🌐 Restoration & New English Subtitles:
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The last Yiddish feature film made in Poland before World War II, this 1939 film was based on a 1907 play by the prolific playwright Jacob

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Gordin. Best known for his folksy didacticism and moralism, Gordin brought the common life of the Lower East Side to the Yiddish stage. With over 100 plays to his credit, Gordin was a formative influence on modern Yiddish theater. He was so popular among theatergoers that, reportedly, a quarter of a million people attended his funeral in New York City.

Without a Home is the story of the hardships faced by immigrants in America at the turn of the century. Its touching portrayal of the difficulties of immigrant life enthralled Jewish theater audiences and it became part of the standard Yiddish stage repertoire in America and Poland. The film provides a poignant and dramatic picture of a difficult era, focusing on the bleak prospects for the survival of traditional Jewish family values. When the eldest son of the Rivkin family is drowned, the father leaves his family in Europe to go to America. There, he finds only financial hardship and loneliness, struggling to find a way to bring the rest of his family over. The stellar cast includes stage actress Ida Kaminska and the hilarious comedy duo, Dzigal and Shumacher, who provide a healthy measure of comic relief.

The title, *Without a Home*, intended by Gordin to symbolize the uprooted Jewish immigrant family and by extension, the Jewish people, was a particularly poignant one for Jewish film audiences in Poland on the eve of World War II. The film underscored the growing sense among Polish Jews facing the Nazi threat and increasing anti-semitism in Poland that they too might soon be "without a home." Also starring Ida Kaminska: *A Vilna Legend*; Also starring Dzigal and Schumacher: *Jolly Paupers* and *Our Children*.

The Yiddish King Lear (Der Yidisher Kenig Lir)

USA, 1935, 86 min, b&w (16mm)

Yiddish w/ English subtitles

Director: Harry Thomashofsky (Supervisor: Joseph Seiden)

Jacob Gordin's famous play transposes the Shakespeare story to turn-of-the-century Jewish Vilna. At a family seder the pious patriarchal father announces to his three daughters that he is dividing his fortune among them and going to Jerusalem to live out his days. The father refuses to listen to the warning of his virtuous daughter who denied his authority by becoming a student in St. Petersburg. The scheming of one son-in-law and the self-righteous indolence of the other soon result in poverty and disgrace for the father. Much pain and agony ensue before the moral of the story unfolds. Also by filmmaker Joseph Seiden: *God, Man and Devil*, *I Want to Be a Boarder*, *The Living Orphan*, *Love and Sacrifice*, and *Motel the Operator*.

With *Der Yidisher Kenig Lir*... [Gordin] crystallized the Lower East Side conflicts between traditional, immigrant parents and their modern Americanized children." - J. Hoberman, *Bridge of Light: Yiddish Film Between Two Worlds*

Yiddle With His Fiddle (Yidl Mitn Fidl)

aka *Castle in the Sky*

Poland, 1936, 92 min, b&w (35mm/16mm)

Yiddish w/ English subtitles

Directors: Joseph Green & Jan Nowina-Przybylski

🌐 Restoration & New English Subtitles:
The National Center For Jewish Film

VHS \$72
MUSICAL
COMEDY

Director Green returned to his native Poland from America to produce this, the most commercially successful musical in the history of the Yiddish cinema. Starring Molly Picon, consummate comedienne of Yiddish theater, vaudeville, and film. This is the classic folk comedy about a man and his daughter who, penniless, decide to become traveling musicians. The daughter disguises herself as a boy to relieve her father's anxiety about unforeseeable problems that could befall a young woman "out in the world." They then join together with "another" father-son duo for music, comedy, and romance.

Green's original screenplay was enhanced by the folksy lyrics of Yiddish poet Itzik Manger and the memorable musical score of Abraham Ellstein, as well as the talents of Leon Leibold, the romantic lead who later starred in *The Dybbuk* and *Tevye*, and Max Bozyk, a character actor par excellence. Breaking away from the studio-bound cinematography of the early Yiddish talkies, the film was shot on location in the picturesque town of Kazimierz and nearby Warsaw. With *shtetl* inhabitants as extras, the film captures the vitality and invincible spirit of traditional small town Jewish life. Also directed by Joseph Green: *A Letter to Mother*, and *Mamele*. Also starring Molly Picon: *East and West* and *Mamele*.



"With Picon at her pert best, a lilting score, and picturesque scenery, the 1936 Yidl turned into the first truly international Yiddish-movie hit." - Karen Lipson, *New York Newsday*

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Yizkor

Remade in 1933 as Prince and Pauper

Austria, 1924, 100 min, b&w (16mm)

Silent w/ English intertitles

Director: Sidney M. Goldin

🌐 Restoration & New English Intertitles:
The National Center For Jewish Film



Made in Vienna, then touted as 'the Hollywood of Europe,' this period drama set in 18th century Volhynia dramatizes the theme of fidelity to one's self and one's community. Maurice Schwartz stars as Leybke, a handsome Jewish guardsman in the employ of a local count. When Leybke, who is engaged to the daughter of the local innkeeper, spurns the advances of the count's daughter, she retaliates by falsely accusing him of attacking her. Although Leybke manages to escape and marry his betrothed, the countess arranges to have the Jewish community held hostage until Leybke surrenders to her. In the end, our hero martyrs himself and saves his brethren. Also directed by Sidney M. Goldin: *A Cantor on Trial*, *The Cantor's Son*, *East and West*, *The Feast of Passover*, and *Uncle Moses*. For Maurice Schwartz see also: *Teveye*, *Uncle Moses*, and *Unfortunate Bride*.

"[Yizkor] presents Jewish life evolving in dialectical relation to the Gentile world—a point of particular relevance for a city as simultaneously charged by political antisemitism and Jewish cultural achievement as postwar Vienna." - J. Hoberman, *Bridge of Light*

Short Fiction Films

A Cantor on Trial (Khazan afn Probe)

USA 1931, 10 min, b&w (35mm/16mm)

Yiddish w/ English subtitles

Director/Producer: Sidney M. Goldin

🌐 Restoration & New English subtitles:
The National Center For Jewish Film

Cantor Leibeke Waldman plays multiple roles in this short spoof of a synagogue committee in search of a chazan (cantor) for the High Holiday services. Cantor Waldman introduces each scene, as a *Galitzianer* and then a *Daytsher* (German) chazan audition. Displeased with what they've heard, and unable to agree, they are visited by

DVD/VHS \$72

NEW ON DVD

Leibeke's agent who offers them a third alternative: a modern Chazan, with "pep and jazz," who can do Kol Nidre with a "two-step" and Netaneh Tokef with a "black bottom." Also directed by Sidney M. Goldin: *The Cantor's Son*, *East and West*, *The Feast of Passover*, *Uncle Moses*, and *Yizkor*. See also: *Great Cantors*.

Comrade Abram (Tovarishch Abram)

DVD \$36

USSR, 1919, 18 min, b&w (35mm/16mm)

NEW ON DVD

Silent w/ English intertitles

Director/Cinematographer/Designer: Alexander Razumni for the Mos-Kino Committee

🌐 Restoration: The National Center For Jewish Film

One of a series of short Bolshevik propaganda fiction films, *Comrade Abram* focuses on Abram Hersh, a young Jewish pogrom survivor who became a factory worker and organizer in Moscow and eventually rose to leadership in the Red Army. This short film emphasizes Hersh's suffering and heroism as both worker and Jew, and promotes solidarity over anti-semitism.

The Feast of Passover (Di Seder Nakht) VHS/DVD \$36

USA, 1931, 15 min, b&w (16mm)

NEW ON DVD

English, Hebrew & Yiddish (no subtitles)

MUSICAL

Producer: Sidney M. Goldin for Jacob Berkowitz

A seder in the midst of North American prosperity recalls traditional Passover celebrations in Russia (with the same cast enacting both scenes). Then modernity returns with a knock at the door and a humorous twist. Featuring Cantor Leibeke Waldman and the Vilna Troupe. Also directed by Sidney M. Goldin: *A Cantor on Trial*, *The Cantor's Son*, *East and West*, and *Uncle Moses*, *Yizkor*. See also: *Great Cantors*.

I Want To Be A Boarder (Ich Vil Zeyn a Boarder)

🕒 AVAILABLE ON DVD with *American Matchmaker*

USA, 1937, 15 min, b&w (35mm/16mm)

Yiddish w/ English subtitles

Director: Joseph Seiden

🌐 Restoration & New English Subtitles:
The National Center For Jewish Film

An hilarious classic of Yiddish absurdism, showcasing Leo Fuchs's comic virtuosity. Leo Fuchs's song-and-dance numbers are the highlight of this lively short film about a husband and wife who seek to reignite their marriage by pretending to be landlady and tenant. Also by filmmaker Joseph Seiden: *God, Man and Devil*, *The Living Orphan*, *Love and Sacrifice*, *Motel the Operator*, and *The Yiddish King Lear*.

"If you can't laugh at yourself, it's going to be a tough life." - Joseph Seiden, *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*

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Non-Fiction Films

An Appeal to the Jews of the World VHS \$25

USSR, 1941, 6 min, b&w (16mm)

Russian, Yiddish & English w/ English subtitles

🌐 Restoration & New English Subtitles:

The National Center For Jewish Film

In 1941, a group of the Soviet Union's most prominent Jewish writers and artists signed an appeal to Jews throughout the world, asking them to join the Soviet people "in the holy war against Fascism...to destroy the enemy of humanity and of the Jewish people." The group included actor Solomon Mikhoels, poet Peretz Markish, and film director Sergei Eisenstein. This newsreel footage captures their eloquent, impassioned appeals. Tragically, Mikhoels and Markish later fell victim to the Stalinist purges in the 1940s and 1950s (Eisenstein died of natural causes in the 1940s). This film stands as an important record of how the Soviet government relaxed its ethnic policies in order to appeal to anyone who could help fight fascism and the Nazis.

Children Must Laugh (Mir Kumen On) VHS \$54

Poland, 1935, 63 min, b&w (16mm)

English & Yiddish w/ English subtitles

Director: Aleksander Ford for the Jewish Labor Bund

🌐 Restoration: The National Center For Jewish Film

Directed by Lodz native Aleksander Ford and financed by the Jewish Labor movement in Poland, *Children Must Laugh* is one of the few surviving documentaries about Jewish life in Poland before World War II. This institutional film was produced to raise funds for the Vladimir Medem Sanitarium which, noted for its modern and spacious facilities, stood as the embodiment of health and enlightenment, in striking contrast to the grim images of urban Polish-Jewish poverty.

The sanitarium's theme song, "Mir Kumen On (Here We Come)," punctuates the film with a sense of hope and accomplishment. The Bund's optimistic internationalism, exemplified by the children's endearing performances, permeates the film, creating powerful yet unintended ironies for post-Holocaust audiences.

Dream of My People VHS \$54

USA, 1934, 66 min, b&w (16mm)

English & Yiddish language versions available

Director: A. J. Bloome for Palestine-American Film Co.

An early travelogue of Palestine, featuring the last appearance of Cantor Yossele Rosenblatt. Locations featured here include Jerusalem sites (the market, Hebrew University, the King David Hotel, the Jewish Agency); the Judean Hills, Mikve Israel Agricultural School; pioneers working in fields; Rishon le Zion; Rehovot; Nes Ziona; citrus picking and packing; Jezreel valley and settlements; Tiberias and Lak Kinneret;

Bedouin dwellings; Tel Aviv and Jaffa beach and street scenes; and the Maccabiah Stadium.

We Live Again (Nous Continuons)

France, 1946, 53 min, b&w (35mm)

Yiddish w/ some English subtitles

Produced by the Central Committee for Child Welfare of the Union of Jews for Resistance and Mutual Aid

Among the first movies to deal with the subject of the Holocaust, this documentary about Jewish war orphans opened in New York in September 1948 and has rarely been seen since. According to film critic J. Hoberman, the film was modeled on *Children Must Laugh* (Mir Kumen On, 1935, see above), a pre-war Yiddish-language film about Jewish orphans. The film incorporates newsreels, actual footage of children receiving aid from relief agencies, and a few staged sequences. An introductory credit reads: "This film is about the children in the Homes and Camps of France, operated under the auspices of the Jewish Union for Resistance and Mutual Aid. It was produced in the summer and fall of 1946, two years after the Liberation and is dedicated to the memory of those who died so that their children might live and laugh in Peace." The film is an important companion piece to both *Our Children* and *Long Is the Road*, two post-war films about displaced persons restored by NCJF.

Yosl Cutler and His Puppets

DVD/VHS \$25

USA, 1935, 18 min, b&w (16mm)

NEW ON DVD

Yiddish w/ new English subtitles

🌐 Restoration: The National Center For Jewish Film

This film is a performance of one of Yosel Cutler's solo puppet shows. These fanciful and slightly surreal sketches preserve his work with the marionettes he designed, built, and brought to life. A multi-talented artist, writer, poet, and Yiddish Art Theater designer, Cutler is probably best known as the cartoonist for *The Freiheit*, a Jewish communist newspaper.

Pre-World War II Travelogues

Jewish-Poland Five Cities

NEW ON DVD

Poland, 1938/39, 10 min/each, b&w

DVD/VHS

Yiddish w/ English subtitles

Each / \$25

Producers: Shaul & Yitzhak Goskind

All 5 / \$100

Text & Narration: Asher Lerner; Photography: V. Kazimierzak

🌐 Restoration & New English Subtitles:

The National Center For Jewish Film

In 1938 and 1939, Shaul and Yitzhak Goskind of Warsaw-based Sektor Films produced six short films about urban Jewish communities in Poland. One, about Lodz, is lost. The other five - on Bialystok, Cracow, Lwow, Vilna, and Warsaw — have survived. Viewed together or

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separately, these rare documents present vibrant portraits of people, communities, and institutions all but completely obliterated after the Nazis invaded and occupied Poland during World War II.

◆ **Jewish Life in Bialystok (1939)** Vivid cinematography and music evoke the industrial and cultural center that was Bialystok in 1939. Images of smokestacks, power looms, and textile workers; downtown shops and buses, market day with peasants and horses; schools, synagogues, the Sholem Aleichem Library, the TOZ sanatorium, and a community-run summer camp reflect the diversity of the city's 200-year-old Jewish community. In addition to the tile-roofed home of Dr. Zamenhof, creator of Esperanto, *Jewish Life in Bialystok* features memorable images of a spacious park where young adults relax and children play.



Bialystok

◆ **Jewish Life in Cracow (1939)** Focusing on Cracow's Jewish quarter, this film intermingles old and new, using music to enhance the images. Streetcars share tree-lined streets with horse-drawn carriages; people conduct business under umbrella-covered markets and arcaded market halls; parks and schoolyards host sports, games and animated discussions. Scenes of the famous Remu Synagogue and the Alte Shul, an orphanage, a hospital, the Jewish Community Council, and several schools convey the vitality of this age-old Jewish community.



Cracow

◆ **Jewish Life in Lwow (1939)** Stylish women promenade through modern Lwow's thriving market squares to a piano-and-violin accompaniment suggesting urban rhythms. Also known as Lemberg and home to an old, well-established Jewish community, this city nestled in a valley projects an aura of prosperity. Parks and pavilions punctuate its public spaces as trucks, pushcarts and bicycles ply its

busy streets. Among the Jewish community landmarks shown are the Yad Haruzim Trade Union Building, the Old Ghetto, the softly curving exterior of the Modern Temple, the orthodox school, the Moorish-looking Lazarus Hospital and the grave of the "Golden Rose"—filmed in warm, dappled light—and the Nowosci Theater.



Lwow

◆ **Jewish Life in Vilna (1939)** This rare film document captures the spirit of Jewish life in pre-World War II Vilna. Lively narration and music accompany film sequences of people engaged in the rituals and realities of daily existence at work, at play, in the synagogue, and in school. Vilna's famous landmarks—the Strashun Library, Shnipeshiker Cemetery and the YIVO Institute—are among the film's highlights.



Vilna

◆ **A Day in Warsaw (1938)** The lively Jewish neighborhoods of Warsaw, including Zamenhof Street and the commercial "beehive" Nalewki Street, were home to 400,000 Jews before World War II. *A Day in Warsaw* juxtaposes Warsaw's modern multi-storied buildings and broad streets with its old market square and Jewish quarter. Trucks, trolleys, autos and buses meet horse-drawn carriages, pushcarts, and porters in the bustling commercial district. Also shown are the Yiddish Theater, Gensza Cemetery, and other Jewish institutions—the community council, hospitals, schools, and synagogues. At film's end, after Sabbath services, families pour into Krashinsky Park where children play and adults spiritedly debate the issues of the day.



Warsaw

Contemporary Yiddish Films

The Bent Tree

USA, 1980, 8 min, animated (16mm)

Yiddish & English

Directors: Sally Heckel Singer & Josh Waletzky

Short Fiction

The Bent Tree is an animated fable based on Itzik Manger's folk tune, "Afn Veg Shteyt a Boym" (On the Road Stands a Tree) about a child whose mother deprives him of freedom to explore the world. Josh Waletzky's music and vocals infuse this work with warmth and feeling.

"Sally Heckel's sand animation is skillful and lyrical, its patterns visually follow the flow of the song." - Edith Zornow, Film Producer, Children's Television Workshop (1980)

The Cowboy

USA, 1968, 11 min, b&w (16mm)

Yiddish (no subtitles)

Director: Abe Wexler

VHS \$25
COMEDY
MUSICAL

It's just your typical all-Yiddish shoot-'em-up. A small boy falls out of a covered wagon on its way West and shows up years later as a quick-trigger cowboy. When he is unjustly accused of theft, a gunfight breaks out to the strains of "Oyfn Pripitchik." This hilarious spoof was made by adding a Yiddish dialogue to a 1932 Hollywood Western.

The Quarrel

Canada, 1992, 88 min, color (35mm/16mm)

Director: Eli Cohen

DVD/VHS \$36
NEW ON DVD
Feature Film

"*The Quarrel* brings to the screen one of the most powerful works of modern literature—a haunting story by Yiddish writer Chaim Grade that was written shortly after the Second World War. Two survivors of the Holocaust, accidentally reunited in a park in Montreal in 1948, take up their argument just where they left it nine years earlier: one of the men is a pious Hasid who runs a yeshiva for Jewish orphans, the other a secular writer who has long since lost his religious faith. The war

deprived them of everything, including all the members of their families; yet, instead of deadening their appetite for life, the losses they suffered and the brutalities they witnessed have only reinforced the Orthodox Jew's trust in God and the secular skeptic's trust in himself. As they spend the day together, the two men alternately cling together to recall their common past, and lock horns in debate over their opposing views of God and the world. For them and for the audience, the concentrated drama of their encounter passes too quickly. " - Ruth Wisse, Chair in Yiddish Literature, Harvard University

So We Said Goodbye

Israel, 1991, 26 min, color/b&w (35mm)

Hebrew & Yiddish w/ English subtitles

Director: Jorge Gurruch

DVD/VHS \$36
NEW ON DVD
Short Fiction

Saying goodbye to his son and grandchildren who are leaving Israel, Yackov remembers when, as a child, he said goodbye to his family in Poland in 1937, not realizing that he would never see them again.

"This beautiful short [fiction] film by the outstanding Israeli photographer Jorge Gurruch moved me to tears. Do not miss it!" - Nacham Ingbar, *Yediot Aharonot*

Documentaries About Yiddish

Nemt: A Language Without a People DVD \$72 For a People Without a Language

France, 2004, 90 min, color, In English

Directors: Isabelle Rozenbaum & Michel Grosman

Nemt (take!) is the last Yiddish inscription rescued from the walls of Vilnius, the "Jerusalem of Lithuania," once a thriving capital of Jewish culture. *Nemt* is a film about the identity and universality of Yiddish culture. As one of the filmmakers returns to her native Lithuania, she attempts to find clues to a history that was interrupted, first when part of her family was murdered in 1941 and later when the family left the Soviet world.

The film's narrative blends her childhood impressions with the memories of the preceding generation. This leads to a broader series of reflections on the survival of the Yiddish language in today's world. The Summer Yiddish Program in Vilnius is the centerpiece of an investigation of the vitality and renaissance of a linguistic and spiritual treasure. Through Yiddish, the young people in the film seek to recapture a very long and integral part of European history. Hence the fact that so many people, both Jews and non-Jews, are now trying to revive the world of Yiddish within their present cultures. Though some painful memories are also evoked with this process, this film is an uplifting attempt to redefine the place of Yiddish in today's world.

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The Yiddish Cinema

USA, 1991, 60 min, b&w/color
Director: Rich Pontius

DVD/VHS \$25
NEW ON DVD

Narrated by prolific writer and director David Mamet, this film is a perfect way to introduce new audiences to Yiddish cinema. Nourished by Yiddish literature and theater, Yiddish film production in Eastern Europe and the United States flourished between the two World Wars. *The Yiddish Cinema* traces the history of the genre through interviews, archival photographs, and film clips of many of The National Center for Jewish Film's Yiddish feature films.

The film explores the reasons for the decline of Yiddish cinema, including the Holocaust, the Stalinist suppression of Jewish culture in the Soviet Union, and America's demands for assimilation among its new immigrants.

Yiddish: The Mame Loshn (Yiddish: The Mother Tongue)

USA, 1980, 58 min, color (16mm)
Writer/Producer: Pierre Sauvage

DVD/VHS \$36
NEW ON DVD



The first documentary ever made about this diverse, rich, centuries-old language, *Yiddish: The Mame Loshn* is a great way to introduce new audiences to *Yiddishkeit*, and an excellent companion film to *The Yiddish Cinema*. Shot in New York and Los Angeles, this affectionate, well-researched portrait examines the importance of Yiddish to American Jews today and evokes the language and culture's pleasures through poetry, illustrations, interviews, and film clips. The film features lively music by the Klezmerim and interviews with comedian David Steinberg, actor Herschel Bernardi, writer Leo Rosten, *Daily Forward* editor Simon Weber, and Yiddish scholars Joshua Fishman and Saul Goodman. Also directed by Pierre Sauvage: *Weapons of the Spirit*.

"Yiddish lore and derivations, traditions and opinions have been admirably assembled and showcased..." - *Daily Variety*

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"What other language has long endured without a homeland?' Sauvage asks, and then effectively proceeds to evoke the pleasures of Yiddish..." - *The Hollywood Reporter*

Zoll Zeyn

Israel/Germany, 1989, 135 min, color (16mm)
Yiddish w/ English subtitles
A film by: Henryk M. Broder & Frans van der Meulen

VHS/DVD \$72
NEW ON DVD



The present (1989) state of Yiddish culture in Israel is examined, from socialist Bundists in Tel Aviv to the Orthodox in Jerusalem, and all the people, poets, singers, revolutionaries, journalists, and actors in between for whom Yiddish is a living language in the midst of Hebrew. The Yiddish speakers interviewed discuss their love of Yiddish language and literature and the attitude in Israel toward Yiddish. They also share stories and vignettes highlighting the incredible vitality and richness of *Yiddishkeit*.