

# YIDDISH THEATER: A LOVE STORY

**A FILM BY DAN KATZIR**

**Film opens in NYC on NOV. 21. at the Pioneer Theater**

**Film opens in L.A. on NOV. 30 at the Laemmle Grande Theater**

Publicity Contact:

Sasha Berman  
Shotwell Media  
2721 2nd St. # 205  
Santa Monica, CA 90405  
310-450-5571  
[SashaBerman@earthlink.net](mailto:SashaBerman@earthlink.net)

Distributor Contact

Ravit Markus  
New Love Films  
336 North Orange Grove Ave.  
Suite #1  
Los Angeles, CA 90036  
(310) 210-1162  
[info@newlovefilms.com](mailto:info@newlovefilms.com)

PRESS KIT AND STILLS at: [www.yiddishtheater.net](http://www.yiddishtheater.net)

## YIDDISH THEATER: A LOVE STORY

*"Yiddish is the most alive dead language."* I.B. Singer

### Synopsis

---

*Yiddish Theater: A Love Story* is a documentary film about Zypora Spaisman, the extraordinary 84-year-old actress and Holocaust survivor who has kept Folksbiene, the oldest running Yiddish theater in America, alive. This heartwarming story of one unique woman's struggle portrays the fight of both an old art form to stay relevant and an old actress to find meaning and a stage in a society that worships youth.

Shot in real time in one of the coldest winters in New York, the film follows Zypora through the hectic week during which she must raise enough funding to keep her last show going and maybe even transfer it to Broadway.

The documentary incorporates rare interviews with some of the oldest legends of Yiddish Theater, including Shifra Lerer, Felix Fibich, and the late Seymour Rechzeit. It also captures places that are part of New York's Jewish history and no longer exist, such as the original 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue Deli along with its Yiddish walk of fame.

The 80-minute film is not rated.

### Exhibition and Credits

---

Exhibition Format: Betacam SP  
Sound Format: Stereo  
Production Format: DVCAM on SONY PD150

Premiere: San Francisco, Jewish Film Festival, July 2006  
Theatrical Premiere International: Lev Cinema, Tel Aviv Israel, November 15 2007  
Theatrical Premiere Domestic: NYC, The Two Boots Pioneer Theater, November 21 2007  
Los Angeles, The Laemmle's Grande, November 30  
2007

Film Festivals Jerusalem Intl, Toronto Jewish, Santa Barbara Intl, Palm Beach Intl, Atlanta Intl.

A Production of.....New Love Films  
A Film by.....Dan Katzir, Ravit Markus and Yael Katzir  
Produced by.....Ravit Markus and Yael Katzir  
Edited by.....Neta Dvorkis, Adam Shell  
Camera by.....Dan Katzir

Written by .....Dan Katzir and Ravit Markus

Directed by.....Dan Katzir

*Yiddish Theater: A Love Story* was made under the auspices of the Center for Jewish Culture and Creativity, along with the generous support of the Makor Film Fund, the Yablon Foundation, and the Goldrich Foundation.

## **Production Notes**

---

*Yiddish Theater: A Love Story* is finally coming to theaters after seven years of raising necessary funds and creating excitement among theaters and audiences. When the documentary began filming in 2000, Yiddish culture was regarded as too old and foreign to have commercial appeal. Now, just a few years later, as the grandchildren of Holocaust survivors reflect on their heritage, a Yiddish revival is growing.

Through the film, the legacies of Zypora Spaisman and the Folksbiene Theater will live forever. The documentary includes Spaisman's last performance before her death at the age of 86, as well as interviews with some of the last remaining stars of the Yiddish stage. The film captured places in New York that no longer exist: the original 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue Deli, along with its Yiddish walk of fame, was converted into a bank after the documentary was shot. Additionally, the Hebrew Actors Union's archive of the Yiddish Theater is decaying, yet it is clearly documented in the film.

The documentary has been widely well-received at festivals both by audiences and the press.

## **The Yiddish Language**

---

Beginning in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, Yiddish used to be the official language of Jews from Central and Eastern Europe, known as [Ashkenazi Jews](#). A hybrid of medieval German and a little [Hebrew](#), Yiddish is written in an alphabet based on Hebrew letters and borrows vocabulary from English. Yiddish is a unique and expressive language that even gentile Americans use, whether they are 'schlepping' or listening to a 'shpiel.'

## **The Yiddish Theater and Zypora Spaisman**

---

Yiddish culture has a rich theatrical tradition, and Yiddish theater helped bridge the shtetl and America. In the early 1880s, anti-Jewish pogroms in Russia caused many Jews to immigrate to the United States. By 1924, two million Jews had arrived, mostly from Eastern Europe and Russia. While they brought their rich culture with them, their American-born children naturally assimilated into American culture. The audience for the Yiddish theater dwindled as young Jews lost sight of their native tongue and culture.

When the Folksbiene Theater was founded in 1915 on the Lower East Side in New York, the area

also had 14 other Yiddish theater companies. Only the Folksbiene has remained a constant presence, almost entirely due to the perseverance of Zypora Spaisman.

Zypora Spaisman was born in Lublin, Poland on January 2, 1916. She worked as a midwife for many years, including during World War II, during which she saw terrible suffering. After surviving the Holocaust, Spaisman immigrated to the United States in the 1950s and became an actress. Her burning passion for the stage and for the Yiddish language kept New York's famed Folksbiene Yiddish Theater alive for 42 years.

Spaisman retired when she was 84, but refused to just sit at home. Instead, she embarked on a new production with the Yiddish Public Theater. Her charisma attracted an entire company of actors and producers, young and old, to partake in her project. *Yiddish Theater: A Love Story* captures the spirit of Spaisman and her love for Yiddish theater.

### **Director's Statement, by Dan Katzir**

---

In December of 2000, I was vacationing in New York when I met Zypora Spaisman and experienced her incredible energy. Upon first meeting me, she forced me to see her Yiddish show. It was the first time I had ever been invited to see a Yiddish production. At that time, Yiddish represented an old world that I never liked or cared about. Moreover, my family was personally involved in the building of the Israeli state and in the eradication of Yiddish as a spoken language there. My beloved grandmother's claim to fame was being part of a youth squad that roamed the streets of Tel Aviv and forced people to stop using Yiddish and to speak in Hebrew instead.

However, by the end of the show, I had fallen in love with Yiddish, Yiddish Theater, and the actors who were struggling to keep their show alive. I was shocked by the small audience turnout, even when the production was voted one of the top ten off-Broadway shows in 2000. The fascinating actors asked me if I could help in any way, and I suggested documenting their show.

The documentary became a journey not only into my grandparents' culture and heritage, but also into the real meaning of art. As a young artist, I learned the meaning of perseverance and the importance of the love of art for art's sake, even when there may not be any audience for it.

Director's official Blog: <http://outforlove.blogspot.com/>

### **About the Filmmakers**

---

**Dan Katzir's** films have won 22 International awards in the U.S., Europe and Asia and a nomination for the Israeli Academy Award. His films have been shown in hundreds of film festivals and in many prestigious television stations around the world. His film *Out for Love... Be Back Shortly* became an instant classic expressing the voice of his generation and becoming an

essential film about the Rabin era in Israel. The film was screened in the U.S. on HBO on Valentine's Day. Dan recently finished his first fiction novel, which is now being edited by a large Israeli publishing house. He is currently working on his first fiction feature in the US.

Katzir was born into a family of great political and social prominence in Israel. His great uncle, Efraim Katzir, was the nation's fifth president. He is also related to Israel's second Prime Minister, Moshe Sharet. Dan served in the Israeli army in the prestigious paratroopers (Red beret) unit and finished his army service with the rank of Lieutenant. Katzir graduated from Tel Aviv University with honors. He also holds a master's degree from the American Film Institute (AFI) in Hollywood.

Ms. **Ravit Markus** is a graduate of the Film and Television Department at Tel Aviv University in Israel. The Israeli Cinema channel bought and aired her final thesis film. In her mandatory army service in Israel, she was selected to an esteemed film unit, where she worked on numerous hands-on filmmaking projects. After the army, she worked with some of Israel's best producers on a number of projects. Since moving to Los Angeles, Markus has worked on various international co-productions, including *Yiddish Theater: A Love Story* and a documentary for Channel 4 UK. The documentary was shot in Los Angeles and aired on television stations around the world, including the Sundance Channel, to rave reviews.

Ms. **Yael Katzir** is an award winning producer, director, and screenwriter of many documentary films, including *To Brave a Dream - The story of the American colony in Jaffa*, *Company Jasmine*, and *Shivah for my Mother*. All have aired on Israeli television and have screened in dozens of international film festivals.

Katzir directs Beit Berl Academic College's television center in Israel, which broadcasts locally and internationally. Previously head of the college's history department, she is now a lecturer on film and history and is also a published author. Her newest film: *Praying in her own Voice* just premiered in the Docaviv International documentary film festival in Tel Aviv.

Katzir received her bachelor and doctorate degrees at Hebrew University in Jerusalem. She has also studied at UCLA and Boston University.