

Voila! French feast of films

DON PERLGUT

THE Jewish experience in France is a complicated one: after centuries of persecution, Jews were emancipated during the French Revolution, and Napoleon spread this freedom to Jews in other parts of Europe as he expanded the French empire.

Yet it was in France that the Jewish captain Alfred Dreyfus was falsely accused of treason, and French collaboration with the Nazis in persecuting Jews was widespread. Today, with more than half a million Jews living in France, the Jewish contribution to French life and culture is significant, especially when it comes to movies.

The annual Alliance Française French Film Festival, which screens in Sydney from March 4-23 and in Melbourne from March 5-23, features two movies with Jewish themes among the program of 46 features and documentaries - *Friends From France* about Russian-Jewish refuseniks and *Belle and Sebastian* on Jewish refugees fleeing the Nazis into Switzerland.

The festival, which this year celebrates its 25th anniversary in Australia, also screens *Grand Central*, a new film by French-Jewish director Rebecca Zlotowski (*Belle Epine*) and a small retrospective of films by Francois Truffaut, who is a significant figure in French Jewish film.

Despite its inherent human drama during a heightened time of Cold War tension, remarkably few films have tackled the experience of Soviet Jews during the Brezhnev "refusenik" period, when many Jews attempted, usually without success, to leave Soviet Russia.

Friends From France, directed by Anne Weil and Philippe Kotlarski, is set in 1979 when two French Jewish cousins (played by Jeremie Lippmann and the singer Soko) travel to Odessa pretending to be an engaged couple on a holiday, but are really there to make contact with Soviet-Jewish dissidents.

It's a period of danger and secret police raids. Complications ensue when the cousins become attracted to each other, and the personal and the political become intertwined.

Belle and Sebastian is a new version of the well-known story that started life in 1965 as a children's novel by

French actress and author Cecile Aubry. Set in the French Alps, it tells the story of the friendship between a young French boy and a wild dog, who local villagers suspect of killing their sheep.

The book was adapted into a French TV series and then a Japanese animated series, but this new film version has been re-set in 1943 and moved to the French-Swiss border, with an additional theme of local Nazi soldiers who are trying to close down an escape route of Jewish refugees going over the mountains to Switzerland.

It is beautifully filmed in the French mountain high country, with excellent acting by Felix Bousquet as the young Sebastian, the experienced Tcheky Karyo as Sebastian's adopted grandfather and some astonishing Pyrenean mountain dogs playing Belle.

It's a warm-hearted story aimed at family viewing, and the addition of the Jewish refugee sub-plot fits neatly into the heroic story of Belle and Sebastian.

Filmmaker Francois Truffaut (1932-84) is not identified as Jewish in the popular mind, but private research in the late 1960s identified his previously unknown father as Jewish.

While Truffaut's mother denied the allegation, Truffaut reportedly embraced it, believing that it explained much of his character and his interest in society's outcasts and martyrs.

Truffaut's first wife, Madeleine Morgenstern, was Jewish, as were his two daughters with her - Laura and Eva.

More than that, we remember Truffaut for his two classic Jewish films: *Au Revoir Les Enfants* (*Goodbye, Children*) and *The Last Metro*.

While neither of these films are included in the retrospective, it features *Finally, Sunday!* and *Jules and Jim* as well as the autobiographical *The 400 Blows*.

The French Film Festival opens with the 2014 Nils Tavernier drama *The Finishers* and closes with Jacques Tati's classic 1958 comedy *Mon Oncle*.

The Alliance Française French Film Festival screens in Melbourne from March 5-23. More information and bookings: www.affrenchfilmfestival.org.



A scene from director Regis Roinsard's *Populaire*, which is set in the 1950s and pays homage to classic Hollywood romantic comedies.



Wartime suspense in *Belle and Sebastian*.



Drama in Francois Truffaut's stylish 1983 thriller, *Finally, Sunday!*

Watch the trailer for *Belle and Sebastian*
Available on the iPad app and e-paper edition

Showcasing Cassab's art

DANNY GOCS

A MAJOR exhibition honouring award-winning artist Judy Cassab opens at Mossgreen Gallery in Armadale on Saturday, March 1.

Many of the works in the exhibition, *Judy Cassab: A Celebration*, have been sourced from the family's private collection, and it includes portraits and landscapes that have not been publicly shown for many years.

The exhibition continues the celebrations marking the 60th anniversary of Cassab's first exhibition at Macquarie Galleries in 1953 and was the brainchild of her son, John Seed.

"These kind of exhibitions are usually held after someone dies, but I thought it would be great if she could enjoy the celebrations while she is alive and in good health," Seed explains.

The first major exhibition was held at Eva Breuer Art Dealer in Sydney last November and a host of galleries have been involved in the celebrations, including the National Portrait Gallery, Art Gallery of NSW, Sydney Jewish Museum and the University of Melbourne.

Cassab, who is now 93, was born in Vienna, studied art in Prague and survived the war by assuming her maid's identity.

Cassab migrated to Australia in 1951 with family and quickly gained recognition for her portrait art, winning the prestigious Archibald Prize for portraiture in 1961 and 1968.

Judy Cassab: A Celebration is at Mossgreen Gallery, 926 High Street, Armadale from March 1-20. Enquiries: www.mossgreen.com.au



Artist Judy Cassab

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Win tickets to see Orphaned Land

Middle Eastern heavy metal band Orphaned Land hits Australian shores in March with the "All Is One World Tour" sweeping through Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane. Orphaned Land has become renowned internationally for fusing elements of traditional Middle Eastern music with the fundamentals of progressive heavy metal. Orphaned Land's career contains many highlights, such as supporting Metallica, collaborating with Steven Wilson, and playing major festivals such as Sonisphere and Wacken Open Air.

Orphaned Land are possibly the most popular Israelis in the Middle East, with their music attracting a huge Arab following. Orphaned Land regularly plays huge shows in Turkey, where their fans travel far distances and face danger in their home countries (such as Syria and Egypt) to see their heroes perform. They have been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize and received "The Peace And Friendship Award" from the Turkish government.

Orphaned Land will be at The Factory Theatre in Sydney on March 20, and at the Gershwin Room at the Esby Hotel in Melbourne on March 22. Tickets are on sale via wildthingpresents.com, Oztix and the venues. *The AJN* has three double passes each for Melbourne and Sydney to give away over the next three weeks.

For your chance to win this prize log on to jewishnews.net.au and follow the links. Competition entries close on Thursday, March 13 at noon. For a complete list of terms and conditions please go to the competitions page.

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Win tickets to a preview screening of The Monuments Men

Based on the true story of the greatest treasure hunt in history, *The Monuments Men* focuses on an unlikely World War II platoon, tasked with going into Germany to rescue artistic masterpieces from Nazi thieves and returning them to their rightful owners.

It would be an impossible mission: with the art trapped behind enemy lines, and with the German army under orders to destroy everything as the Reich fell, how could they possibly hope to succeed?

But as they found themselves in a race against time to avoid the destruction of 1000 years of culture, they would risk their lives to protect and defend mankind's greatest achievements.

Starring George Clooney, Matt Damon, Bill Murray, John Goodman, Cate Blanchett, *The Monuments Men* is in cinemas March 13.

The Australian Jewish News has 10 double passes to give away to a preview screening of the film at 6.30pm on Wednesday, March 12 at Event Cinemas Bondi Junction in Sydney, and Village Cinemas Jam Factory in Melbourne.

For your chance to win this prize log onto jewishnews.net.au and follow the links. Competition entries close on Monday, March 3 at noon. For a complete list of terms and conditions please go to the competitions page.

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