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Publisher's Opinion

SBU film festival offerings enhance our lives

By Leah Dunaief

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A downed Israeli pilot tries to escape from Palestinian captivity in Lebanon, helped by a 10-year-old Palestinian refugee. A love affair begins, against all odds, between the fiancée of a wealthy Dutch industrialist on the eve of the Nazi bombing of the Netherlands and a hotel bellboy. A 17-year-old gang leader on the gritty streets of the Brooklyn waterfront is trying to escape the murderous intentions of a notorious gangster. An 11-year-old with special needs and lots of courage, the son of a butcher whose family business is threatened by the coming of a supermarket in their small Belgian town, finds himself in a cycle race sponsored by the supermarket.

These are all snippets from movies showing at one of the best fun events of our neighborhood. The 10-day offering is the annual Stony Brook Film Festival at the Staller Center through this Saturday, July 27, and features independent films from all over the world. If they are good, festival Director Alan Inkles and his hardworking staff cull them from the hundreds of entries, and they find their way into our local festival.

Themes are as varied as the countries they represent. A good story is a good story. Some are almost documentaries, others historical fiction, still others are purely imaginative. All are intended to engage and entertain, whether profoundly or with a light touch.

One of the many benefits from living here is the enhancement to our lives by the community offerings of the colleges and universities. Stony Brook University is a giant in that regard, and the film festival is now in its 18th year. There are residents who have bought season passes for every year of the event, and the pleasure continues. Passes are \$80 for all 10 days, too late for this year but something to remember for next, and that includes some three-film offerings plus shorts in a single day. For movie aficionados, there is ample supply. For others who like to ruminate on each film for several days, there is enough to select from, and for those whose schedules only permit one or two movie selections, there are single tickets for \$9 or \$7 for seniors and students, if the performances aren't sold out. Often the director or producer and perhaps the leading actors are available for after-film Q&As, which lends an additionally satisfying dimension to the experience.

Just because I dislike unresolved plots, I will share with you that the pilot does make it back to Israel, along with his young Palestinian companion, who helps him truly to understand the deep-seated yearning of the refugees to return to their homes. The love affair that develops against the backdrop of falling bombs and heavy politicking and opportunism in pre-World War II Europe has a Titanic-like ending. The young gang leader discovers that there is more to life than survival in the streets. And the copper-haired young cyclist transcends the limitations of his small town and his shortsighted family to realize his dream, making life better for everyone else around him in the process.

Some kudos are in order for terrific acting, especially on the parts of the youngsters in the various films and the shorts. Make note of their names, for if they stay in acting, I predict great success for them in the future.

Stony Brook makes it easy to attend. The parking is ample and free in the adjoining multistory garage, the theater has comfortable seats without any obstructed locations, there is a wide screen, and the sound system is superior — plus there is air conditioning to beat the oppressive heat.

Part of the satisfaction of attending is catching up with so many friends and neighbors during intermissions. And the audience is encouraged to vote since there is a competition among the offerings. Some of the films are having their U.S. premieres, others their East Coast or New York premieres. All hope they will be picked up for national and international distribution, and some invariably are. Remember, you saw it first here, folks.