

# Film fest to end on a delightful note

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SPECIAL TO THE CJN

After 11 days of programming, the Toronto Jewish Film Festival will end on a high note, with several films destined to make audiences smile and laugh.

*The Go-Go Boys* and *Look at Us Now, Mother!* are two hilarious documentaries focusing on fraught family relationships. Meanwhile, *Mr. Kaplan*, an award-winning comedy from Uruguay, will serve as a delightful dessert when it closes the festival on May 10 at the Bloor Hot Docs Cinema.

Film aficionados should not miss *The Go-Go Boys: The Inside Story of Cannon Films*. The doc tells the story of two cousins, Menahem Golan and Yoram Globus. Golan and Globus were popular Israeli filmmakers who found international success after they moved to Los Angeles in the early 1980s.

Their American studio, Cannon Films, mainly produced films considered to be a schlocky alternative to more reputable mainstream titles. Critics hated them, but audiences in the mood for thrills and vulgarity could not resist the Cannon output.

Filled with sex and violence, these movies were cheap to make yet made a killing at the box office. Some of their biggest hits include *Breakin'* and *Bloodsport*, as well as numerous titles with Chuck Norris and Charles Bronson.

Despite the company's fate, watching Globus and Golan recount their biggest successes is a delight. The best part of the doc is at the end, when the cousins sit in a darkened movie house, watching and reacting to their biggest Israeli and American hits.

They earned the nickname "The Go-Go Boys" for the speed they could get a film from the script stage to the big screen. Filled with candid interviews with the titular cousins, the doc about them is suitably fast-paced. It is also a frequently funny flashback to an era of Hollywood rarely seen on the screen.

*The Go-Go Boys* screens at Empress Walk on May 6 and the ROM Theatre on May 9. (Two of the producers' biggest lewd hits, *Lemon Popsicle* and *The Last American Virgin*, also play at the festival.)

Meanwhile, screening on May 8 (at the ROM Theatre) and, more appropriately, on Mother's Day at Empress Walk, is *Look at Us Now, Mother!* In the film, director Gayle Kirschenbaum explores her difficult relationship with her mother, Mildred. It's a poignant and hilarious doc that should resonate with Jewish mothers and daughters.

Kirschenbaum always found her mom to be mean and highly critical. Mildred, meanwhile, cannot understand why her daughter won't get a nose job or find a husband.

*Look at Us Now, Mother!* is a therapeutic film of sorts, exploring the misery behind the women's resentment of each other. Kirschenbaum shares painful journal entries from her youth when her mother humiliated her. Mildred also opens up about her difficult childhood and her sadness after her husband of more than 50 years dies.

The dysfunction could have been too much to bear; however, the director finds the right mix between rudeness and tenderness. Mildred has no filter, but although she says some incendiary things that should get big laughs, she has a lot of good things to say about her director daughter.

Although the film loses a bit of focus when it sprawls to examine other family members, anyone watching the doc should be able to relate to some of the stories of family struggle. *Look at Us Now, Mother!* is a deft blend of sharp comedy and observational drama.

Both the director and her mother will be at the screenings, as well, which should make for a spirited post-film discussion.

Finally, closing night pick *Mr. Kaplan* – Uruguay's submission for the foreign language film Oscar – should send audiences home happy. Filled with comic energy due to its sly parodies of spy flicks, it tells the story of Jacob Kaplan (Héctor Noguera), a Jewish man struggling to cope with old age.

When Kaplan hears about a Nazi hiding in South America, he makes it his personal mission to find the war criminal and bring him to Israel to be tried in court. To help him with this task is Wilson Contreras (Néstor Guzzini), Kaplan's bumbling driver who used to be a police officer.

The two men make for an inspired comic pairing and the film often moves in unpredictable directions as Kaplan comes ever closer to capturing the shifty Julius Reich. Writer/director Álvaro Brechner has a knack for creating memorable comedy set-pieces, including a suspenseful scene on a diving board (as Kaplan cannot swim) and a dizzying dream sequence.

It doesn't boast a lot of slapstick, but there are some cheeky sight gags and deadpan reaction shots, as well as much witty banter between Noguera and Guzzini. Gorgeously lensed and terrifically acted, *Mr. Kaplan* is a wonderful film about second chances. ■



Above, Gayle Kirschenbaum, right, with her mother. At right, Alvaro Brechner's *Mr. Kaplan* closes the festival.

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