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'The Prime Ministers' leads film festival

By Randall P. Lieberman, Staff Writer

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Of the more than 175 films in the upcoming 28th annual Fort Lauderdale International Film Festival advertisement (Oct. 18 –Nov. 11), perhaps the one most interesting to Jewish audiences is *The Prime Ministers: The Pioneers*.

The film is based on the best-selling book by Ambassador Yehuda Avner, who served as chief aide, English note-taker and speechwriter to Israeli prime ministers Levi Eshkol, Golda Meir, Yitzhak Rabin, Menachem Begin and Shimon Peres from 1958 to 1983.

The 115-minute docudrama, directed by Academy Award winner Richard Trank, features voiceovers by major Hollywood actors Sandra Bullock (Meir), Michael Douglas (Rabin), Leonard Nimoy (Eshkol) and Christoph Waltz (Begin).

The film is the 13th release by Moriah Films, the documentary division of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, of which Trank is the executive producer and principal writer/director. The film was co-written and co-produced by two-time Academy Award winner Rabbi Marvin Hier.

"Almost two years ago, I was introduced to *The Prime Ministers* by my fellow producer, Rabbi Marvin Hier," Trank said. "As soon as I began reading it, I realized that it could be the basis of an incredible documentary. Learning the history of Israel and some of the most significant events of the 20th century through Ambassador Avner's eyes has not only been fascinating but transformative."

The first of two parts (the second is due out in Spring 2014), the film focuses on Avner's years working with Prime Ministers Eshkol and Meir and then-U.S. Ambassador Rabin. The film reveals new details about the Six-Day War, the development of Israel's close strategic relationship with the U.S., the fight against terrorism, and the Yom Kippur War and its aftermath.

Behind-the-scenes stories are brought to life involving Presidents Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter. Henry Kissinger, Margaret Thatcher, Moshe Dayan, Harry Truman, Anwar Sadat and Princess Diana also appear in the film.

The Prime Ministers: The Pioneers is playing at Cinema Paradiso-Hollywood on Oct. 26, Muvico Pompano on Oct. 27, Cinema Paradiso-Fort Lauderdale on Oct. 31 and Sunrise Civic Center Theater on Nov. 3.

Two short, Holocaust-related, documentary films are being shown together, including director Matthew White's

The Upside Down Book (51 min.) and director David Lyons' *Simon Says* (44 min.)

The Upside Down Book follows the history of a 1938 copy of *Mein Kampf*, Adolf Hitler's political manifesto. Karen and Fred Mandell of Boston, parents of filmmaker Hinda Mandell, have displayed this book upside down for decades. Fred Mandell's uncle, Eddie Cohen — a Jewish-American soldier — brought home the book from Germany at the end of World War II. The filmmakers track down the book's original owners and seek to connect the two families.

Eddie Cohen lived in Sunrise from 1978 to his death in 2001 and his widow, Shirley Cohen, and two sons, Michael and Aaron, still live in [Broward County](#).

Said Michael Cohen, "The film was a statement not only about the importance of the Jewish family but also of the great debt we owe to veterans like Eddie Cohen as both Jews and Americans. It is a testament to the defeat of evil and the need to make sense of our past."

Simon Says chronicles the life of Simon Lewenberg, a Holocaust survivor and resident of Sunrise. A spry, gentle man at 91, Lewenberg's story will make you laugh and cry, and, most of all, wonder how he is so kind after all the pain and horror he's seen.

Said Lewenberg, "The *Simon Says* documentary enabled me to tell my story to those who will see the film and encourage them to read my book, which details the horrible conditions I lived under during the Nazi occupation of Poland."

The two films are playing at the Muvico Pompano on Nov. 5; at Cinema Paradiso-Hollywood on Nov. 6; at the Sunrise Civic Center Theater on Nov. 7 and at Cinema Paradiso-Fort Lauderdale on Nov. 11.

Other festival films of interest to local Jewish audiences are *Shadows from my Past*, *Taking Charge: The Pauly Cohen Story*, *The Pin*, *The Strange Case of Wilhelm Reich* and *Walking with the Enemy*.

Local FLIFF venues are in Davie, Fort Lauderdale, Hollywood, Pompano Beach and Sunrise. For the festival schedule, prices and movie descriptions, visit <http://www.FLIFF.com>, or call 954-525-3456.

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