

NEXT YEAR JERUSALEM

THE JOURNEY OF A LIFETIME

A Documentary by David Gaynes

72 Minutes / 2014 / USA / English / Digital (DCP & BluRay) / Color



FIRST RUN FEATURES

The Film Center Building
630 Ninth Ave. #1213
New York, NY 10036
(212) 243-0600 / Fax (212) 989-7649
Website: www.firstrunfeatures.com
Email: info@firstrunfeatures.com

Logline:

Choosing life in life's final chapter is the poignant subtext of *Next Year Jerusalem* a poetic examination of the experience of eight nursing home residents who travel to Israel on a tour. The film is an earnest reflection on the sanctity of human experience and a reverent portrait of life's eldest travelers.

Short Synopsis:

Choosing life in life's final chapter is the poignant subtext of the new independent documentary *Next Year Jerusalem*, a lyrical portrait of eight nursing home residents who travel to Israel on a tour. Earnest and nuanced, *Next Year Jerusalem* is a poetic exploration of living and dying, hope and fear, travel and memory. It is a celebration of human experience and a reverent tribute to life's eldest travelers.

Full Synopsis:

Next Year Jerusalem tells the story of eight nursing home residents, average age 91, who make a pilgrimage to Israel. We follow the residents, their aides and nursing home managers from the planning stages of the trip through their experiences in Israel and back again. Each character surprises the viewer with earnest and nuanced reflections on travel, aging and hope.

The film intends to paint an honest portrait of life at life's end. Those who spend their final days in a nursing home face difficult questions: what to look forward to, how to mark their days. The promise of one last adventure raises the stakes. In the first act, we meet and befriend the travelers. We learn their histories, their daily routines, their philosophies. They share openly both their excitement and fears about the trip. We bear witness to the reality of planning the tour from the perspective of the nursing home: not only is the trip logistically complicated, but there are concerns that not all residents will be healthy enough to go, and the very real possibility that some may not return.

The trip to Israel evolves as a film within a film, dream-like, as audiences are offered a seat on the bus for the 10-day tour. Though we are in and out of museums, crossing Israeli landscapes from mountains to desert, the experiences of the trip itself are not the focus; rather they are a context for the more subtle insights revealed by our travelers along the way. Physical challenges are met and exceeded, new friendships blossom. Spiritual experiences, so deeply at the heart of any journey to the "Holy Land" are documented and presented in their complexity. These are individuals with personal theologies: some are Jewish, some Christian, others are non-believers. There is a tension at work here that is honest and revelatory. In one of the great spiritual centers of the world, their spiritual engagement is twofold: not only are they visiting iconic religious sites, but they do so with the humble awareness that they will never be there again.

Back at the nursing home at the end of a remarkable adventure, our travelers accept without grudge the routines of institutional living. Things "go back to normal" at the conclusion of the film but our travelers are not the same people they were before the trip. *Next Year Jerusalem* is less a story about tourists in a foreign land than it is a celebration of life, a meditation on the sanctity of human experience and a tribute to the wisdom acquired in the course of a lifetime.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT:

Next Year Jerusalem is my third documentary feature and a continuation of my attempts to examine the decision to choose life in spite of death. This is a special project because my first documentary film, a short, was photographed at the Jewish Home for the Elderly (Fairfield, CT) the nursing home featured in Next Year Jerusalem. That project (*More Than Skin Deep*, 2002) explored awareness of aging on the part of five nursing home residents, interviewed during their weekly beauty shop appointments.

I am fascinated with exploring the subtle distinctions between living and dying. Framed by the story of elderly people going on one last adventure, I found a vehicle to pose existential questions in subtle ways: at one moment a reflection on the vain struggle to capture experiences in a photograph, in another the frustrated refusal to accept mediocre hospital food. The stakes of living can be high in the final stages and I wanted to bear witness to the complicated dynamics of acceptance when life's end is near.

I felt it important that I photograph the work myself. First, it seemed important to work in a small crew (alone, or at times with a soundman) to build the necessary trust with my subjects. But it also felt necessary that the recording device and the questioner be the same person. It strikes me, in films by directors who photograph their own work, the deep connection between the lens and the director's curiosity. In the tradition of cinema verite, I wanted to bring viewers into the moment, whether we were in the nursing home or Israel and I felt the best approach for successfully making the camera the viewer's proxy was to be the cameraman. I also anticipated that in leading with my eye, the "syncs"-- those moments when sound and image are one-- would be revelatory, naked and unadorned, observations presented with an unspoken understanding (and infinite humility) that these people's connection with the eternal is happening soon. I'm not suggesting I always achieved this successfully, but this is my best account of the philosophy behind the choice. Additionally, it was probably to the benefit of the project that I am thirty-six. In relation to these elders, perhaps my ignorance inspired them to share their wisdom with me.

I am proud that we achieved a kind of elegance within the simplicity of the film's technique and story. The Israel section has a dream-like quality that benefits from a strict adherence to the language established early in the very un-dreamy nursing home section. I believed, rightly or not, that a somewhat dispassionate approach to the material was in fact a kind of reverence for it; that some corners of the world are more romantic and dreamy than others, just as some moments in our lives are (and aren't). I intended to make relevant that idea for myself and viewers of the film, those of us who, theoretically, have some time left on the clock. Isn't there dignity in approaching both with the same degree of equanimity? And what are the Israels for which we personally have yet to travel?

Cast and Crew:

David Gaynes, director, producer, camera, editor: Next Year in Jerusalem is David's third documentary feature. Saving Hubble (2012) tells the story of America's fight to save a beloved scientific icon from becoming space junk. The Hubble Roadshow is the film's unconventional chautauqua-style distribution campaign through which it has been seen in non-traditional venues across the country and at the International Astronomical Union General Assembly in Beijing. Keeper of the Kohn (2005) won the Jury Prize for best documentary at the Vail Film Festival and the Audience Award at the Palm Beach Film Festival and has been seen on television, in theatrical venues and the internet. More Than Skin Deep (short, 2002) was seen on select public television stations. David is an accomplished cinematographer, having recently photographed the award-winning documentary All Me: The Life and Times of Winfred Rembert (Dir. Vivian Ducat, 2011). David is routinely enlisted as a director, cameraman and editor for an array of television, corporate and non-profit videos and films.

Mark Becker, editor: Mark Becker produced, directed and edited the documentary ROMANTICO (2005), which was nominated for the Grand Jury Prize at the Sundance Film Festival and received two Independent Spirit Award nominations, including Best Documentary. Becker edited and directed the film PRESSURE COOKER (2008) for Participant Media. The film was nominated for an Emmy for Nonfiction Filmmaking and won awards at seven film festivals before opening theatrically. Becker produced and edited the documentary ELEVATE (2011), which premiered at South by Southwest Film Festival, and edited the documentary CIRCO (2010), which was released theatrically and aired on the PBS series Independent Lens.

Christopher Garofalo, original music: An active pianist and accompanist in Chicago area for over 25 years, Christopher Garofalo has composed works for solo piano, voice, choir and chamber ensembles. As a soloist with orchestra, he has performed in Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 23 in A, Beethoven's Choral Fantasy and J. S. Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No. 5. His recording, Silhouettes, released in 2005, features 12 original compositions for solo piano and the original song cycle Within the Circle of the Seasons with tenor Henry Pleas. He has been the Director of Music at the Unitarian Church of Hinsdale since 1987 where he administers a program of classical music and professional soloists. Garofalo's Suite for Flute, Violin, Cello and Piano and Sonata for Flute and Piano are featured in David Gaynes' 2013 documentary Next Year Jerusalem.

PRODUCTION CREDITS:

Directed and Produced by	David Gaynes
Produced by	Jessica Wolfson
Executive Producer	Andrew Banoff
Cinematographer	David Gaynes
Editor	Aaron Wolfe
Associate Producers	Carrie Frank, Deana Bedor
Additional Editing	Mark Becker, David Gaynes
Original Music	Christopher Garofalo
Sound Recordist	Eric Budney
Sound Mix and Design	Alex Noyes

FEATURING:

Regine Arouette, 87

Helen Downs, 91

Sandy Levin, 82

Leslie Novis, 90

Selma Rosenblatt, 93

Harry Shell, 92

Bill Wein, 97

Juna Wein, 89

Andrew Banoff

Donnette Banton

Audrey Stein