

## **Festival explores issues of justice and nonviolence**

In a world in which peace seems ever further away, some of those who seek to understand and perpetuate it will see their efforts on screen this weekend.

Among the offerings at one of Chicago's newer film festivals are several entries of particular interest to the Jewish community.

The Peace on Earth Film Festival will show 30 films dealing with "peace, nonviolence, social justice and an eco-balanced world," according to festival literature. The films and accompanying discussions and panels take place from today, Feb. 25 through Sunday, Feb. 27 at the Chicago Cultural Center's Claudia Cassidy Theater. All screenings and programs are free.

Among the entries is "The Labyrinth," shown on Sunday (for times of specific films visit [www.peaceonearthfilmfestival.org](http://www.peaceonearthfilmfestival.org)). A joint U.S.-Poland production, it's a documentary about Marian Kolodziej, a survivor of Auschwitz who confronts the horrors of his past after 50 years of silence.

He was imprisoned in concentration camps for five years but never spoke about his experiences until 1993, when his rehabilitation from a stroke included doing pen and ink drawings depicting what he endured during those years.

Now his drawings and other artwork are displayed in the basement of a church near Auschwitz. The film blends the artist's words with the drawings to explore the way memories and nightmares buried for years can resurface, according to Nick Angotti, the festival's executive director and one of its founders.

Another Holocaust-themed film in the festival is "The Desperate," which Angotti describes as "a short narrative film based on a true story." The incident on which it is based involved a German general who enlisted the aid of a Jewish doctor when his son was wounded. When the doctor, a concentration camp inmate, saved the son's life, the general offered him the chance to leave the camp. The doctor declined, as his own son was in the camp and he refused to leave without him.

Holocaust-themed films fit in with the festival's mission, Angotti says, because "anything that disrupts the human ability to feel free, to express themselves fully, to infringe upon social justice has to do with our festival. The wars of the world are caused because of the disruptions in the individual consciousness. If I can't get along with myself, ultimately this is why we have wars."

Another film, "Out of Cordoba: Averroes and Maimonides in Their Time and Ours" deals with Maimonides, the great Jewish physician and philosopher, and an Islamic friend of his. "They were part of a culture of tolerance before things changed in Spain," Angotti says. The film follows Maimonides' path through a number of countries and shows "that tolerance was achieved, that it is possible," he says.

Angotti, who co-founded the festival along with Clayton Monical and Milissa Pacelli, has "always somehow been involved with the peace movement," he says. He was an actor for 25 years, then became a minister in the New Thought movement, a religious movement more than a century old that he describes as similar to both Christian Science and the Bahai Faith. He created a cable TV show and began showing films dealing with issues of peace, then decided in 2007 to launch a film festival.

This year the fest has a new venue and is hosted by the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs, and has been changed to a winter event to draw more audience members.

Other films to be shown include "Delicious Peace Grows in a Ugandan Coffee Bean," a documentary about Jewish, Christian and Muslim coffee farmers in Uganda who form a cooperative during the brutal Idi Amin regime; "Radical Disciple, the Story of Father Pflieger," a look at a Chicago priest and activist; "World Peace and Other 4th Grade Achievements," Midwest premiere of a film about a public school teacher and his students participating in a program designed to teach them to work together; "Ronan's Escape," taking on the issue of bullying; and "Loving Lampposts," a look at the world of autism.

Saturday's schedule also includes the Students' Voices for Peace Showcase, a program in which more than 600 students participated, along with their teachers, in a dialogue on nonviolent solutions and practices. Six student films will be shown.

In addition, a filmmakers panel on Saturday afternoon will feature a question and answer session with several participating directors.

Taken as a whole, the films "cover the great modalities of peace and activism that takes place," Angotti says of the festival, and reminds audience members of a quote from President John F. Kennedy: "Peace is a process of gradually