

## The Arts: News and Reviews

# Cinematic Reflections on Jewish Life In 15-Work Festival at 92d Street Y

By RICHARD F. SHEPARD

THE title of the film series that starts today at the 92d Street Y is almost self-explanatory: "American Jewry: Looking at Ourselves." As the title indicates, the series is not so much a festival of 15 films that give a portrait of the nearly six million Jews in the United States and Canada as it is a vision of how they live as seen through the eyes of movie makers.

The scope of the series is so broad that each film presents only a small facet, and one ought not to be surprised if, taken together, the films do not present the complete picture but a montage. They range from such personal, small views as the kitchen reflections of "Gefilte Fish" to the role of activists as limned in the big feature "The Way We Were."

If, in this conglomeration of perspectives by major studios and independents to be seen through Sept. 16, the viewer is left with doubts about what it means, most screenings will end with talks by authorities on one aspect or another of Jewish life or movie making.

Our film series at the Y are designed to provide a forum for independent film makers and also to offer

films of Jewish concern," said Elly Spitz of Jewish Omnibus, the unit that presents the Jewish programs at the Y under the leadership of Rabbi Lavey Derby, the Y's associate director for education.

### The Many Slices of Life

"Jewish film festivals have been catching on around the country," said Karyl Weicher, associate director of Jewish Media Services, a national clearinghouse of Jewish films and video. "But this one at the Y is one of the most important we have put films together for because of the size and composition of the community here."

The films this year, about Jewish life — in documentary and fiction, in light guise and in serious tones — are about the many aspects of life among Jews in the United States and Canada.

For instance, Karen Silverstein's "Gefilte Fish," at 3 P.M. Sunday, is a good-humored 15 minutes that not only shows how to prepare gefilte fish but also reflects the generational attitudes toward it of grandmother, mother and granddaughter. It shares the bill with "Spadina," David Trotter's portrait of life on Toronto's Spadina Street.

At 4:30 P.M., "West of Hester

Street," by Allen and Cynthia Mondell, goes farther West than New Jersey — to Texas, where a plan early in the century was designed to attract immigrant Jews from New York to the Southwest. Jeff Brown's "Molly's Pilgrim," at the same showing, won a 1986 best-short-subject Academy Award for its treatment of a book of the same name. The film is about the problems of a Soviet Jewish immigrant girl in gaining acceptance by her classmates. Barabara Cohen, author of this children's book, is the speaker.

### Rabbi in the Old West

At 8 P.M., the feature film "The Frisco Kid," directed by Robert Aldrich in 1979, has Gene Wilder as a young rabbi traveling through the Old West, learning that life in the New World is not like life in the old country. Dr. Reuven Kimelman, associate professor of Talmud and Midrash at Brandeis University, will address issues raised by the film.

A dazzling diversity of experience is presented on film in the festival. "The Rise and Fall of the Borscht Belt" (Monday at 3 P.M.) dwells on the Catskills resorts, the customers and comedians. "They Shall Not Forget" is Mervyn LeRoy's powerful 1937 fiction feature film, with Claude Rains and Lana Turner, that parallels the anti-Semitic 1915 lynching of Leo M. Frank in Georgia for a murder he denied committing.

A most affecting documentary, "Dark Lullabies," directed by Irene Lilienheim Angelico and Abbey Neidik, comes from Canada for its New York premiere on Sept. 15. Mrs. Angelico, the daughter of concentration camp survivors, sought deeper understanding of what happened to her parents. During the four years her documentary was in the making, she found other children of survivors and attended a Holocaust survivors' gathering in Jerusalem. Then she went to Germany and met people in her own age group, among them children and grandchildren of SS men and a concentration camp commandant, who were unable to reconcile the behavior of their elders at home with their savage zeal at work.

### 'Zelig' at the End

There are films about the Hasidim, about a young Jew who tries to shed his Jewish identity in "beatnik" Greenwich Village, about culture clash. It is perhaps fitting that the series' search for identity concludes with "Zelig." Woody Allen's 1983 comedy about a celebrity who, during the 1920's and 30's, is able to accommodate himself, in chameleon fashion, to any social environment. Dr. Egon Mayer, professor of sociology at Brooklyn College and an authority on intermarriage, will discuss the film.



### Film self-images:

A Jewish banana peddler in Texas is one of the characters in "West of Hester Street," a documentary at the 92d Street Y.

Also on the schedule is

