

WHAT'S NOT TO LIKE? Hollywood's Love Affair with Jewish Humor

Lecture and clip show by Peter L. Stein



The Jewish contribution to American movies tends to focus on its legendary producers and studio moguls, from Samuel Goldwyn and the Warner Bros. to Steven Spielberg. But just as important is the unmistakable stamp of Jewish humor that has made a lasting—and hilarious—impression on movie audiences worldwide, over the course of 100 years of American cinema.

“What’s Not to Like?”—an entertaining talk with generous and funny clips—looks at some of the hallmarks of Jewish humor that have come to define American movie comedy. Beginning with tricksters like the Marx Brothers, wise-cracking their way into the halls of power, we find that much of Jewish humor in the movies is rooted in their status as outsiders. We’ll also examine the particular American Jewish characters (even stereotypes) that form the foundation of Jewish movie comedy: the endearing nebbishes and shlemiels of early Woody Allen and Gene Wilder; guilt-dispensing Jewish mothers and bookish scholars; funny misfits (think young Streisand); culminating in the high-wire ridicule acts of Mel Brooks and Sacha Baron Cohen. Along the way we’ll see how the changing status of Jews in America—moving from the margins (Fanny Brice) to the mainstream (Judd Apatow)—has impacted the kind of movie humor we think of as Jewish.

Clips will include a selection from: *Animal Crackers* (1930), *Young Frankenstein* (1974), *The Frisco Kid* (1979), *The Producers* (1967), *Funny Girl* (1968), *Take the Money and Run* (1969), *Annie Hall* (1977), *Torch Song Trilogy* (1988), *West Bank Story* (2005), *Borat* (2006), *The Guilt Trip* (2012).



Peter L. Stein is a Peabody Award-winning documentary filmmaker and freelance film writer, programmer and presenter. For eight years he was Executive Director of the San Francisco Jewish Film Festival and currently serves as Senior Programmer for Frameline, the San Francisco International LGBTQ Film Festival. More information at www.peterLstein.com.

Booking notes:

Length of presentation: approx. 75 minutes, with optional Q&A afterward

Technical needs:

- Podium with sufficient horizontal space for notes and a laptop
- microphone
- digital projector and large screen
- Audio and video used in presentation clips are imbedded in a Keynote (Macintosh) presentation file that can be run from speaker’s Macintosh laptop (Thunderbolt port). Speaker can bring Thunderbolt-to-VGA connector; other adaptors or output requirements should be discussed beforehand. Alternatively, presentation can be played from a thumbdrive on venue’s Keynote-enabled computer, as long as speaker can operate the presentation from the podium.