

NEW FROM **NEW YORKER FILMS**

THE HIDDEN LIVES OF GAY AND LESBIAN ORTHODOX AND HASIDIC JEWS

**"UNFORGETTABLE!"
PROVOCATIVE."**

-ELVIS MITCHELL, NY TIMES

**"★★★★^{1/2}
SURPRISINGLY
FUNNY!"**

-JAN STUART, NEWSDAY

**"POWERFUL!
A FILM THAT
SHOULD,
INDEED MUST
BE SEEN."**

-GEORGE ROBINSON, JEWISH WEEK

**"GROUND-
BREAKING &
INTENSELY
MOVING!"**

-LAWRENCE FERBER, NY BLADE



**TREMBLING
BEFORE
G-D**

A FILM BY SANDI
SIMCHA DUBOWSKI

www.NewYorkerFilms.com
www.TremblingBeforeG-d.com



Director Sandi Dubowski and Rabbi Steve Greenberg (the first openly gay Orthodox rabbi) are available for speaking engagements!! Summer and Fall tour planned - Please inquire.

An unprecedented documentary that shatters assumptions about faith, sexuality, and religious fundamentalism. Built around intimately told stories of Hasidic and Orthodox Jews who are gay or lesbian, the film portrays a group of people who face a profound dilemma - how to reconcile their passionate love of Judaism and the Divine with the drastic Biblical prohibitions that forbid homosexuality.

UNITED STATES • 2001 • 84 mins • Color • In English

The Hardship Of Being Gay In Orthodox Judaism

ELVIS MITCHELL

With "Trembling Before G-d," the director Sandi Simcha DuBowski latches on to a provocative subject and invests it with a compelling tenderness. This documentary is essentially about merging the Old World and the New, but with a twist that is shocking: it concerns the heartfelt desire of homosexuals to find a place for themselves in Orthodox Judaism, where they are shunned and repudiated. When does compassion supplant dogma, or can it? These are the deceptively innocent questions raised by "Trembling," which opens today at Film Forum.

The director knows it would be wrong to take the easy way out and castigate the rabbi who tries to understand the sexual choice of David, a Jew who wants to be a part of the flock and cannot see a way out of his lifestyle. The rabbi does feel that things have changed since the Talmud — which says homosexuality is punishable by death, "an abomination," according to the Torah quote from Leviticus that opens the film — but that has nothing to do with the demands of pure Orthodoxy. For the rabbi, David's path is simple, though for David, agonizingly so: stop his homosexual behavior or be condemned.

In the eyes of some Orthodox believers, death from AIDS becomes a hand striking down the blasphemers who dare to lead lives of open defiance, and "Trembling" doesn't overemphasize the opinion of many Orthodox Jews who think the problems that gays face are justified.

"Trembling Before G-d," a stark and appropriate title, tells several stories, profiling a number of people. Mr. DuBowski knows that the film would shatter if his viewpoint were rendered in hysterical terms or even condescending ones. The film is more interested in dealing with the intrinsic drama in these situations, like that of the gay Jews who decide to divorce themselves from their faith with the same forcefulness used against them.

The position taken by some of the gays and lesbians interviewed for the film is that this resistance gives purpose to their lives and provides a kind of reverse passion.



What the picture needs is a little of what keeps them going — the release offered by walking away from the strictures of the faith and from the harsh rejection they suffer from their families.

But that's not to say that "Trembling" is one-sided or simple-minded. Mr. DuBowski's camera subjects constitute a worldwide sampling taking up both sides of the argument; this kind of raw debate isn't limited to the United States or Israel.

The film's true sadness comes when a therapist, Shlomo Ashkinazy, explains the separatism that has kept such an anti-homosexual stance alive in Orthodox Judaism, even more than the dictum that men and women are to couple primarily to procreate.

And after hearing the views of many fundamentalist Christians, it's obvious that strong views against homosexuals are not limited to Orthodox Judaism.

The fine and powerful "Trembling Before G-d" has gained a whole new urgency and purpose since its screening at the Sundance Film Festival in January. The

subtlety of the pressure on David — the advice given, implying that the necessity to change is easy — is what adds a much deeper undercurrent of tragedy to this unforgettable picture.

TREMBLING BEFORE G-D

Directed by Sandi Simcha DuBowski; in English, Hebrew and Yiddish, with English subtitles; directors of photography, Donna Binder, Sandra Chandler, Mik Cribben, Jim Denault, Ken Drucker, Mr. DuBowski, Kirsten Johnson, Kevin Keating, Karen Kramer, Jennifer Lane, David Leitner, Marie Pederson, Ben Speth, Fawn Yacker and Andrew Yarme (U.S.A.); Noski DeVille and Mr. DuBowski (U.K.); Nili Aslan, Mr. DuBowski, Issa Freij, Jackie Matithau, Yoram Milo, Yitzak Portal and Abigail Sperber (Israel); edited by Susan Korda; music by John Zorn; produced by Mr. DuBowski and Marc Smolowitz; released by New Yorker Films. Running time: 84 minutes. This film is not rated.

WITH: David, Michelle, Devorah, Mark, Israel, Malka, Leah, Rabbi Steven Greenberg, Shlomo Ashkinazy, Chaim, Ben Aaron, Sue, Tova and Shmuel. (Some are pseudonyms.)

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