

J. Michael Hagopian's *The River Ran Red* premieres at Arpa International Film Festival

Final film in Genocide trilogy

HOLLYWOOD, Calif. – Culminating more than 40 years of interviews with 400 eyewitnesses to the Armenian Genocide of 1915, documentarian **J. Michael Hagopian** has completed the final film in his “The Witnesses” trilogy, *The River Ran Red*. The 60-minute documentary premieres at the Arpa International Film Festival on October 24 at the Egyptian Theatre in Hollywood, four days after Hagopian’s 95th birthday.

The River Ran Red is the epic search for survivors of the Armenian Genocide along the Euphrates, which snakes from the Armenian Plateau in Turkey to Syria. From his archives of 400 testimonies of survivors and eyewitnesses, Hagopian weaves a compelling story of terrifying intensity and resounding warmth. The search concludes with the discovery and testimony of the last three survivors, among several thousand, who had been stuffed into a burning cave in the forbidden desert of Der Zor.

“If I succeed in translating to the viewer the experience and the pathos of those Armenians who were deported from their homes and made it to the Euphrates River only to witness the worst

kind of bloodshed, then I accomplished what I set out to do,” says Hagopian, who wrote and produced the film.

Hagopian’s search for survivors took him to 13 different countries on five continents over a period of four decades. He recorded such compelling accounts as that of the priest who returns to his birthplace and meets the man who killed his father and other family members, and those of people who reported seeing hundreds of bodies floating down what they described as the bloody waters of the Euphrates River.

Hagopian was honored with the Arpa Lifetime Achievement Award and the Armin T. Wegner Humanitarian Award in 2006. He also is the recipient of Jewish World Watch’s I Witness Award for dedicating his professional life to chronicling the history of the Armenian people and commemorating victims of the Armenian Genocide.

“We are so pleased to have this opportunity to show Dr. Hagopian’s documentary,” says Arpa Film Festival founder **Sylvia Minassian**. “He is an amazing man.”

Hagopian himself is a Genocide survivor. As a young boy, he was hidden in a well in a mulberry grove to escape Turkish marauders and later fled, with his family, to the United States, where he eventually earned a Ph.D. from Harvard University,



Poster for *The River Ran Red*.

in 1943. He started collecting film footage about Armenians early on in his 60-year career as a documentary filmmaker, and he established the Armenian Film Foundation in 1979 with the help of several community leaders, with the aim of preserving the visual and personal histories of the witnesses of the Genocide.

“Since we started the foundation, our mission has been to serve as the primary motion-picture resource bank of Armenian-Genocide footage for public television, educational institutions, and film and television producers worldwide,” Hagopian says. “Now that we have finished ‘The Witnesses’ trilogy, we are going to turn our attention to digitizing our film

footage so that the survivor and witness interviews will be preserved forever and stand as testament to the horrific events perpetrated by the Ottoman Turkish government against the Armenian people.”

Hagopian has made over 70 educational films. Seventeen of those are about the Armenian people, including *The River Ran Red* and the definitive film on the Turkish massacre of Armenians in 1915, *The Forgotten Genocide*.

There is yet another film that Hagopian plans to make. “I have interviews with survivors of the 1892-95 massacres and of eyewitnesses to the burning of Smyrna,” he says. “There was a 30-year genocidal era in Ottoman Turkish history and that story needs to be told.”

connect:
www.armenianfilm.org
1-805-495-0717

The River Ran Red

Arpa International Film Festival opening night premiere.
Friday, October 24, 8:00 p.m.
Egyptian Theatre
6712 Hollywood Blvd., Hollywood, Calif. 90028
Tickets: www.itsmyseat.com

Arpa salutes actress and activist Mary Apick

HOLLYWOOD, Calif. – The 11th Annual Arpa International Film Festival will honor award-winning actress and activist **Mary Apick** on Sunday, October 26.

The Arpa International Film Festival is produced by Arpa Foundation for Film, Music, and Art (AFFMA), a nonprofit organization dedicated to artists exploring issues of identity, multiculturalism, war, exile, genocide, and global empathy.

Each year, the festival recognizes individuals in the film industry with achievement and humanitarian awards. Apick (Arts & Culture, June 28, 2008) will receive the Arpa Foundation Award for her far-reaching humanitarian contributions. Additionally, the festival will be screening a revival of Apick’s controversial 1987 film, *Checkpoint*.

“I am very proud to be the recipient of the Arpa Foundation Award this year – named after the Arpa River of Armenia, a life-giving body of water,” Apick said. “Arpa’s high standards support the cultivation of cultural understanding and global empathy. The festival celebrates independent thought, artistic vision, and diversity through the art of cinema. In today’s world, we are very well aware of cinema’s power to expand culture towards equality and peace. I share Arpa’s vision.”

Apick began her career as a child performer in Iran. A second-generation actress, she is the daughter of acclaimed actress **Apick Youssefian**. By the age 12, Mary Apick was performing in political and satirical sketches that helped change and liberalize Iranian society.



Mary Apick.

She became one of the country’s most popular stars, appearing on TV as well as in feature films and plays. Among the many awards she received was the Moscow Film Festival Best Actress Award for *Dead End*, which made her the first actress from Iran (and Asia in general) to receive such an honor.

The Iranian Revolution forced Apick to flee her country and move to America. As a graduate of the BBC School of TV Production, she attended the master’s degree program in directing at Cal Arts, and participated in the very first Sundance Institute with Robert Redford. Her credits include performances in the critically acclaimed film *The Mission* and the NBC miniseries *On Wings of Eagles*. Apick also produced the MGM film *Mind Games*.

While working with partner and prolific filmmaker **Bob Yari** (producing the Academy Award-winning film

Crash), Apick continued to stage socially significant theatrical projects. In 2005, she wrote and starred in two politically charged plays that were presented at the Los Angeles Theater Festival. *Beneath the Veil* became a Critic’s Choice and is slated for production in several cities, including Los Angeles, in 2009.

Apick has also created numerous children’s videos, such as *A Fairy Tale in the Forest* and *Jewel of the Night*, which give children of Iranian expatriates the opportunity to learn about their parents’ culture and homeland.

Through the 1980s and 1990s, Apick traveled through the United States, Europe, and Australia, starring in 400 stage performances of the poetic political play *The Ass* by award-winning filmmaker **Parviz Sayyad** (director of *The Mission* and *Checkpoint*).

One of Apick’s lifelong passions has been to help improve conditions for women and children around the world, especially in the Middle East. She has appeared as a spokesperson before the U.S. Congress, and her vigilant voice has inspired generation after generation to continue its pursuit of all freedoms.

“Mary Apick is an actress and activist who exerts herself to improve conditions of the world for all people,” said AFFMA founder **Sylvia Minassian**, commenting on the announcement of Apick’s Arpa Foundation Award. “She is most deserving of such an honor,” Minassian added. “Our vision for global empathy goes hand in hand with the

presentation and the revival of her film *Checkpoint*.”

connect:
www.affma.org
1-323-663-1882

Checkpoint

Saturday, October 25, at 3:15 p.m.
Egyptian Theatre
6712 Hollywood Blvd., Hollywood, CA 90028

Released in 1987 movie *Checkpoint* is an independent, thought-provoking film exploring a 24-hour period in the lives of several Iranian and American students from Michigan State University in 1980.

“Their lives change when their visas expire during travels,” Mary Apick explains. “Due to the Iranian hostage crisis during President Carter’s administration, a crucial time in history that changed the world immensely, they question their own human-rights issues.”

Checkpoint will screen in a program that includes two new films about contemporary Iranian issues: *Young Roots* and *Listen to Iran’s People: A Call for Peace*. After the screening, Apick will take part in a discussion and Q & A about the film and her career. The session will be moderated by **Lucy Der-Tavitian**, host and producer of KPFFK 90.7 FM Pacifica Radio’s South West Asia and North Africa collective.