



At Jewish Humor Festival, the laughs are for everybody

By NICK WOLTMAN
Special to the Star Tribune

You don't have to be Jewish to get in on the laughs at the Sabes Jewish Community Center's fourth annual Humor Festival.

"Comedy is kind of a universal thing," said Claire Avitabile, the Sabes JCC's director of performing arts. "This year we really do have something for everyone."

The festival features eight shows over two weeks beginning Saturday, ranging from standup acts to films, and even includes a laughter yoga workshop.

Avitabile, who organizes the festival, expects at least four of the shows to sell out the JCC's 280-seat theater. Two events sold out last year, and Avitabile says the standup acts are the most popular.

One of the acts she expects to pack the house is Rabbi Sim Glaser's standup show, which will close this year's festival. A local favorite, Glaser's is the only act returning from last year's lineup, where he performed for a capacity crowd.

Glaser's day job is as a rabbi at Temple Israel in Minneapolis. His sense of humor is essential, he says, for entertaining his audience at temple.

"Our sanctuary sleeps 900," Glaser joked. "So we have to be careful not to bore people."

Billed as "The Inappropriate Rabbi," Glaser says festivalgoers shouldn't expect a lot of jokes "about priests and rabbis walking into bars" during his routine. Most of his jokes are drawn from his experiences not only as a member of the clergy but also as a Jew.

"Jewish humor is humor that everyone else can understand — it's just that Jews experience things in big, bold colors," Glaser said. "There's a saying: 'Jews are like everyone else, only more so.'"

Avitabile says the festival is intended to highlight Jewish culture's contribution to humor throughout history, invoking comedy legends from Groucho Marx to Jerry Seinfeld.

"All the great comics have been Jews," Glaser said. "It's a Jewish tradition."

Glaser and Avitabile say this tendency toward humor grew out of the suffering endured by the Jewish people. Making light of a situation is a method of coping, Glaser says, and anti-Semitism



Star Tribune file
Rabbi Sim Glaser will perform his standup show.

FESTIVAL SCHEDULE:

"Motzah Balls & Meatballs" Jan. 12 at 7:30 p.m.

"You Don't Have To Be Jewish... But It Couldn't Hurt!" Jan. 13 at 7:30 p.m.

"Erotic Jewish Humor: The Oxymoron Show" Jan. 16 at 7:30 p.m.

Film: "The Yankles" Jan. 17 at 7:30 p.m. and Jan. 18 at 12:30 p.m.

Unofficial Ladies Night Jan. 19 at 7:30 p.m.

Laughter Yoga Workshop Jan. 20 at 12 p.m.

"The History of Hal" Jan. 20 at 2 p.m.

"The Wicked Wit of the West" Jan. 24 at 7:30 p.m.

"Material I Can't Use In Sermons: An Evening With Rabbi Sim Glaser" Jan. 26 at 7:30 p.m.

TICKETS:

Per show: \$10-\$20 •

Five-show pass: \$50

• All-festival pass: \$90

• For more information, go to www.sabesjcc.org/humor-fest.php

has caused Jews to rely on it over the years.

"If somebody's laughing at you, they can't hit you," Glaser said.

Despite comedy's historical importance in Jewish culture, Avitabile says the JCC's Jewish humor festival is one of only a handful in the country, and that has brought it national attention. She hopes to see more festivals of its kind sprout up in the future.

Nick Woltman is a Twin Cities freelance writer.