

CRITICAL BARBRA

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
December 14-16 2023

Perspectives on Barbra Streisand
First Global Jewish Superstar





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Barbra Streisand, born in 1942 in Brooklyn, New York, is one of the most visible and influential figures in music, film and performance arts of the last fifty years – the “world’s greatest living performer,” as one biographer calls her. A uniquely gifted singer with a mezzo-soprano voice easily spanning three octaves and a stage entertainer who seamlessly integrates musical performance, dance and comedy with storytelling, Streisand became a best-selling recording artist in her early twenties. She went on to an equally successful career in film acting, directing, screenwriting and producing, as well as becoming a politically-engaged public figure. But Streisand was unique in another important way: Breaking with a long tradition of assimilation in the arts, she was the first recognizably and unapologetically Jewish global superstar. “Critical Barbra”, a three-day event at the German Film Museum, the Jewish Museum in Frankfurt and Goethe University, celebrates the many facets of Streisand’s unique talent with film screenings, talks and performances.

Barbra Streisand, geboren 1942 in Brooklyn, New York, ist nach Einschätzung eines ihrer Biographen die „größte lebende darstellende Künstlerin der Welt“ und fraglos eine der einflussreichsten Figuren des Kinos und der Musik der letzten Jahrzehnte. Eine begnadete Sängerin mit einer Mezzo-Sopranstimme mit einem Umfang von mehr als drei Oktaven, brilliert Streisand als Sängerin, Tänzerin, Schauspielerin, Komikerin und Geschichten-erzählerin gleichermaßen. Nach ihrem frühen Erfolg als Sängerin stieg Streisand in den 1960er Jahren zum Filmstar auf und war als Regisseurin eigener Filme wie „Yentl“ ab den 1980ern für zwei Jahrzehnte die mächtigste Frau in Hollywood. „Critical Barbra“, eine internationale Tagung, zelebriert die unterschiedlichen Aspekte von Streisands Talent mit Filmvorführungen, Vorträgen und Performances im Kino im Filmuseum, dem jüdischen Museum Frankfurt und an der Goethe-Universität.

Organized by / Organisiert von

Vinzenz Hediger (Goethe-Universität Frankfurt)

Marc Siegel (Johannes Gutenberg Universität Mainz)

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Fritz Thyssen Stiftung, Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, Stadt Frankfurt, hessische Film- und Medienakademie, Stiftung zur Förderung der internationalen wissenschaftlichen Beziehungen und Profilbereich „Universalität und Diversität“ der Goethe-Universität

All presentations are in English

DECEMBER 14

● Kino des DFF, Schaumeinkai 41, Frankfurt

8 PM / 20:00 SCREENING

Funny Girl

(US 1968. William Wyler. 151 Min)

Introduced by Cheryl Dunye (Oakland)

DECEMBER 15

● Jüdisches Museum, Berta-Pappenheim-Platz 1, Frankfurt

09:30 WELCOME

Marc Siegel (Mainz) and Vinzenz Hediger (Frankfurt)

10:00–12:30 PANEL 1

Had I known you'd all be here, I would have had my nose fixed.

Rebekah Rutkoff (Newark)

The Prismatic Jewess: Streisand and Other Semitic Spectacles

In an office lined by Freudian figurines, Streisand's silky Jewish shrink enchants Nick Nolte's character in *The Prince of Tides* (1991). As she treats his gaping Southern oedipal wounds, the two fall in love. In this meditation on the lure and limits of Jewish femininity as symbolic spectacle, I will explore the film's racialized understructure and set the Prince and Princess of Tides into against-the-grain dialogue with the present-tense.

Rebekah Rutkoff is Assistant Professor of Humanities and Social Sciences at the New Jersey Institute of Technology.

Véronique Sina (Frankfurt)

***Of course you're Jewish – you look like Barbra Streisand!* – (Re) Defining Bodily Gendered Codes of Jewish identity**

Drawing on the queer-feminist work of contemporary Jewish-American artist Deborah Kass as well as on *Funny Girl* (1968) and other examples from her oeuvre, this contribution shows how Barbra Streisand creates a counter-hegemonic canon of images that (re)defines bodily gendered codes of Jewish Identity.

Véronique Sina is the Principal Investigator of the DFG funded project „Queering Jewishness – Jewish Queerness. Discursive Constructions of Gender and 'Jewish Difference' in (Audio-)Visual Media“ (Goethe-University Frankfurt).

Michele Aaron (Coventry)

The Queer Jew from here: Yidl to Yentl to Schmekel to now

(Re)visiting the age-old antisemitic intersection of Jewishness and Queerness within primarily North American visual culture and specifically film, this presentation discusses the formation of the Queer Jew and troubling co-dependency or inspiring 'jewissance' (Boyarin)—it represents. Streisand's legacy within contemporary (queer/Jewish) culture will be foregrounded as will the current urgency of/for radical Jewish voices.

Michele Aaron is Professor of Film and Television at Warwick University and Director of Screening Rights Film Festival. Her work has focused on social justice, ethics and the life and death stakes of film and film culture.

Moderator: Mirjam Wenzel (Frankfurt)

13:30-15:15 **PANEL 2**

I thought I was good as Joan of Arc, really good as Medea, and brilliant as a chocolate chip.

Julie Lobalzo Wright (Coventry)

Funny Girl/Lady: Barbra as Comedienne

While it is common to focus on the drama of Streisand's work, especially her powerful voice and her desire to be seen as a dramatic actress, I'll instead focus on her talent as a comedienne and how comedy has underpinned her career, from her film roles to television and concerts appearances through to her music performances.

Julie Lobalzo Wright is Assistant Professor in Film and Television Studies at the University of Warwick. Her next monograph focuses on Streisand's agency and artistry throughout her 60 plus year career.

Gertrud Koch (Berlin)

Barbra: A (Musical) Comedian

A look back into the tradition of the musical comedies and comedians as they evolved around the jiddisch theatre and film - and the ways taken from voice to stage, song to film, sound to image - and a brief comparison with stars like Molly Picon and other Jewish comedians may allow a perspective on the interplay with voice and body as a constant montage of changing meaning in Barbra's performances.

Gertrud Koch is professor emeritus of Film Studies at the Freie Universität Berlin. She has published books on Marcuse, Kracauer, the ban on graven images and aesthetic theory in general as well as on historical and Jewish representation.

Moderator: Nathan Taylor (Frankfurt)

15:45–17:30 **PANEL 3**

A story behind the lyric that I could hang on to as an actress

Toni Pape (Amsterdam)

A History of Semblances: On Barbra Streisand's Vocal Technique in *Happy Days...* (1963–2018)

Drawing on the concept of semblance (Benjamin, Langer, Massumi), this presentation offers a comparative study of Barbra Streisand's many recordings of *Happy Days Are Here Again*. It plays close attention to Streisand's vocal technique in various versions of the song and traces how she modulates the song's semblance over the decades to adapt its "meaning".

Toni Pape is Assistant Professor of Media Studies at the University of Amsterdam. He is the author of *Figures of Time: Affect and the Television of Preemption* (Duke UP 2019) and the forthcoming *The Aesthetics of Stealth: Digital Culture, Video Games and the Politics of Perception* (MIT Press 2024).

Heather Love (Philadelphia)

Sunday Morning Fever

This presentation will reflect on the album *Guilty* and, in particular, on the vocal and visual collaboration between Barbra Streisand and Barry Gibb in their best-known duets. Approaching this material in an autobiographical mode, I will address the domestication of disco and the appearance of female-centered desire in this performance.

Heather Love (University of Pennsylvania) is the author of *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* and *Underdogs: Social Deviance and Queer Theory*. She is currently working on a new project („To Be Real“) concerning the uses of the personal in queer writing.

Moderator: Rembert Hüser (Frankfurt)

20:00

EVENING PROGRAM

A bit of pâté? I drink it all day.

Marc Siegel on the Barbras in his family
Granpa' Sam (Vaginal Davis, 2001, video)
Art Isn't Easy (Liz Rosenfeld, 2023, video)

AND

No One Leaves Delilah: Don't Tell Me How to Live – (W)rap on La Streisandic Showboating

Vaginal Davis (Berlin) in discussion with Bruce LaBruce (Toronto)
Accompanied by Angela Seo (Berlin)

DECEMBER 16



Renate von Metzler-Saal, Casino Campus Westend, Goethe-Universität,
Norbert-Wollheim-Platz 1

10:00–11:45 **PANEL 4**

I noticed I was making a gesture while singing that I wasn't even aware of.

Joe McElhaney (New York City)

Streisand's Gestural Body: Thinking Like a Director, in a Way.

Streisand's eccentric mobility raises fundamental questions about the gestural body in cinema. In this presentation, I will place the example of her early films in relation to her three films as director and where, in directing, she both builds upon and inverts the implications of figural mobility evident in her prior work.

Joe McElhaney is Professor of Film Studies at Hunter College. His most recent book is *Luchino Visconti and the Fabric of Cinema*.

Johannes Binotto (Zurich/Lucerne)

Wild Analysis. Streisand's Transferences.

Picking up on the psychoanalytic notion of "wild analysis", a pejorative term used by Freud to describe analytical situations that are not controlled by a trained analyst, I want to look at the recurring reference to psychoanalysis in Streisand's oeuvre. Both in her acting style as well as her mise-en-scène Streisand can be seen as a wild analyst, who not only re-enacts but re-locates, re-configures psychoanalytic knowledge in and as star performance.

Johannes Binotto is an experimental filmmaker, video essayist and senior lecturer in cultural and media studies at Lucerne School of Arts and Design and the University of Zurich.

Moderator: Alexandra Schneider (Mainz)

12:00–1PM **LECTURE**

„A Voice Deep Inside“: Streisand, Stanley Cavell, and the Philosophy of Song

Garrett Stewart

This talk triangulates philosopher Stanley Cavell's alternate views of female voice in the fast-talking heroines of 1930s "remarriage" plots versus opera's doomed divas. Streisand follows her musical comedy period with a psychotherapy of voiced desire in *A Star Is Born* and *Yentl* that is then displaced onto the coda of *The Mirror Has Two Faces*.

Author of twenty books, Garrett Stewart, Professor of English and Cinema at the University of Iowa, has held visiting appointments at the Universities of Fribourg, London, and Konstanz. →

I happen to like going to the dentist. It's an hour of peace without phone calls.

Verena Mund (Frankfurt)

Ways to Get There. Stock Footage, Generic Aesthetics and Time Leaps in The Way We Were.

As a historical melodrama, *The Way We Were* tells a love story with many beginnings and endings, set against various political conflicts. Looking at the production files, it becomes apparent that there was no easy agreement on how the movie should begin and establish its time travel. So how does the film show us the way we were – „we,“ meaning us, that is, Barbra, Bob, and us?

Verena Mund is a film and media scholar and curator and the scientific coordinator of the Research Training Program “Konfigurationen des Films” at Goethe Universität Frankfurt

David Gerstner (New York City)

What's Up Doc?: Barbra Streisand, Telephone Calls, and Auteur Theory

Barbra Streisand takes to the telephone with enthusiasm, marking the device as a significant trope, lending itself to ways to theorize Streisand's position as auteur. In her film musical-comedies (1968-75), the phone call reveals Streisand as the woman who “arranges things.” In short, the auteur. Taking *What's Up Doc?* as my launch point, Streisand's cinematic telephone reveals a commanding auteur where “none had been seen before.”

David A. Gerstner is Professor of Cinema at the City University of New York.

Queer Imaginings: On Writing and Cinematic Friendship is his most recent book (2023)

Moderator: Camilo Porrás Sandoval (Mainz)

They say success changes a person, but I think it makes you more of who you really are.

Heike Paul (Erlangen)

Singing to American Presidents: Barbra Streisand's Civil Sentimentalism

Barbra Streisand used sentimentality in her performances as a singer and entertainer at various points in time and on markedly different occasions to take activist stances. In the public and political sphere. This talk looks at several examples, including her contribution to Bill Clinton's inauguration gala in 1993 as well as her firm critique of yet another president, Donald Trump, 25 years later.

Heike Paul is chair of American Studies at Friedrich-Alexander Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg and director of the Bavarian American Academy in Munich.

Elisabeth Bronfen (Zurich)

The Joy of Flying

In *Funny Girl* and *Yentl* Barbra Streisand makes use of affective excess in key musical numbers. The omnipresence this affords the star offers an insight into Streisand's unique contribution to celebrity culture.

Elisabeth Bronfen is professor emeritus from the University of Zurich and Global Distinguished Professor at NYU.

Moderator: Ritika Kaushik (Frankfurt)

17:45–18:00 CLOSING REMARKS

Marc Siegel and Vinzenz Hediger

ZUSÄTZLICHE FILMVORFÜHRUNGEN / ADDITIONAL SCREENINGS



Kino des DFF

23.12. 17:30

Funny Girl

(US 1968. William Wyler. 151 Min)

21.12. 17:30 + 26.12. 20:30

Yentl

(US 1983. Barbra Streisand. 133 Min)

28.12. 18:00

The Way We Were

(US 1973. Sydney Pollack. 118 Min)