

October 14th 2005
For immediate release:

Members of the Bulgarian Church are recognized for saving Jews during WWII

Members of the Bulgarian Church were recognized for their role in stopping the deportations of the Bulgarian Jews to the death camps. **The Metropolitan Bishops Stephan and Kiril** received an award in a ceremony following the NY Premiere of the film **The Optimists: The Story of the Rescue of the Bulgarian Jews from the Holocaust**.

This award winning documentary tells the inspiring story of how Bulgarian individuals helped their Jewish friends and neighbors and managed to save 50,000 Bulgarian Jews. **The Optimists** will open theatrically in NY on October 21st, at the Quad Cinema, in NYC. Director **Jacky Comforty** will be available to answer audience questions after selected screenings.

The event was sponsored by The Consulate General of Israel in New York, The Consulate General of Bulgaria in New York, The American Society for Yad Vashem, The American Jewish Committee, The American Sephardic Federation, The Center for Jewish History and organized in collaboration with **The International Raoul Wallenberg Foundation**

Esme Berg, Executive Director of the American Sephardi Federation and H.E. **Arye Mekel**, Consul General of Israel in New York, opened the event with introductory remarks.

Following the screening of the film, **Father Dimitri Dimitroff** a metropolitan of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church accepted an award on behalf of the two Bulgarian Metropolitans highlighted in the film, Bishop Stephan and Bishop Kiril, whose acts of defiance during the war helped save 50,000 Bulgarian Jews from deportation. The award was presented by **Dr. David Elcott**, the Director of Interreligious Affairs of the American Jewish Committee.

H.E. Arye Mekel, Consul General of Israel in New York, **H.E. Stefan Tafrov**, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Bulgaria to the UN, **H.E. Elena Poptodorova**, Bulgarian Ambassador to the United States; **Nikolay Milkov**, Consul General of Bulgaria in New York; **Victoria Schonfeld**, Honorary Bulgarian Consul in New York and **Abigail Tenenbaum**, Vice President of the International Raoul Wallenberg Foundation., were some of the distinguished participants at the ceremony.

Film producer and director **Jacky Comforty** and **H.E. Elena Poptodorova**, the Bulgarian Ambassador the United States, were available for a question and answer session where Bulgarians living in New York had the opportunity to express their gratitude to the director for the production of the film. Comforty told the audience about the almost twenty years it took to finalize the film, "I didn't make the film for my mother, who appears and was saved by the Bulgarian people, I did it in order to educate the world about the great deeds of these people and about how one person can really change the course of history".



Father Dimitri Dimitroff accepts the award bestowed to Metropolitan Stephan and Metropolitan Kiril on their behalf. Consul General of Israel in NY, Arye Mekel, and Ambassador of Bulgaria to the USA, Elena Poptodorova in the back.



H. E. Elena Poptodorova

Ambassador of Bulgaria to the USA,



Director Jacky Comforty

Print quality publicity photos, full press kit, and video trailer are available at www.theoptimists.com

The Optimists:

The Story of the Rescue of the Bulgarian Jews from the Holocaust

Starts October 21st at the Quad Cinema, 34 West 13th Street, New York, NY 10011

Show Times: 1:00, 3:30, 5:30, 7:30, 9:45

Director **Jacky Comforty** will be available for Q and A during the first week after the 1:00 PM and 7:30 Shows. Groups who would like to coordinate additional appearances please write comforty@comforty.com or call toll free 866-690-6992

★★★★ **"The message is so powerful . . . one of the best films of the year."**

– George O. Singleton, *Reel Movie Critic.com*

★★★ **"A miraculous sharp movie."**

– Patrick Z. McGavin, *Chicago Tribune*

★★★ **"Individuals triumph over odds in inspiring 'Optimists'."**

– Hedy Weiss, *Chicago Sun Times*

★★★★ **"Spellbinding. A message of inspiration and hope."**

– Bruce Ingram, *Pioneer Press*

The Optimists tells the inspiring story of how 50,000 Jews in Bulgaria survived the Holocaust because their Bulgarian neighbors and friends helped defend them. Many individuals, each in his or her own way, took action to foil the Bulgarian Government's plans to hand over the Bulgarian Jews to the Nazis. The film features everyday heroes and role models from all walks of life. Their stories are an especially compelling lesson for today's world.

The Optimists is directed by award-winning filmmaker, **Jacky Comforty**, whose family was among those who survived, and who worked 12 years to produce this story.

The film informs and inspires audiences of all ages and backgrounds and lends itself to exciting post-screening discussions. Audiences come away with a heightened sensitivity to personal responsibility, religious and ethnic tolerance, and to human and democratic values.

The Optimists has been publicly shown in more than fifty cities around the world, and is Co-Winner of The Peace Prize, Berlin International Film Festival; First Prize for "Documenting the Jewish Experience," Jerusalem International Film Festival; CINE Golden Eagle; Best Documentary, Hope and Dreams Film Festival.

More information, including pres kit, audience evaluation, printable press images and video excerpts are available at www.theoptimists.com.

"Everyone is entitled to his own faith.

No one should violate the intimate, spiritual life of another.

**That's how I think now, that's how I have thought in the past,
and if I live any longer, that's how I'll think then."**

- **Bishop Boris Kharalampiev**, the Bulgarian Orthodox priest
who helped stop the deportation of the Jewish citizens of his city in 1943.

"This is a film that celebrates the human spirit. It offers hope that people of different races and religions can learn to live together in peace."

- **Leora Frucht**, *The Jerusalem Post*

"The Optimists is a wonderful film. The title refers not only to a Bulgarian jazz band, but to how the audience feels after watching such a moving testament to human decency."

- **Annette Insdorf**, Author of *Indelible Shadows: Film and the Holocaust*.

"This film teaches how commitment to justice and respect for others can triumph over oppression. A must-see for anyone learning or teaching the Holocaust."

- **Dr. Shani Beth-Halachmy**, Professor of Educational Psychology, National College of Education

"The Optimists in a beautiful and dramatic way tells what a community in extremis can do to help others in distress. It is a powerful and a heartwarming story which deserves to be seen and discussed. "

- **Rabbi Peter S. Knobel**, Beth Emet the Free Synagogue

"I am confident that the American audience will be impressed by the power and the triumph of hope and human spirit in The Optimists."

- **H.E. Elena Poptodorova**, The Bulgarian Ambassador to the US

The Optimists is a presentation of [Comforty Media Concepts](http://www.comforty-media-concepts.com) and The Chambon Foundation.
Directed by Jacky Comforty, Produced and written by Jacky and Lisa Comforty. Distributed by Castle Hill Productions.