All You Need Is Love
Oscar-winning Jewish-Danish director helms new romantic comedy with a serious underside.

Curt Schleier
Special to the Jewish News

Danish director Suzanne Bier’s latest film, Love Is All You Need, is a romantic comedy that came from a dark place, from what she calls “the sad part of the story” - cancer.

The film stars Pierce Brosnan as Philip, a wealthy middle-aged widower and ex-pat Brit living in Copenhagen. Co-star Trine Dyrholm is Ida, a hairdresser whose mastectomy has, for the time being at least, beat cancer — only to discover that her husband is leaving her for a younger co-worker with whom he’s been having an affair. Philip and Ida meet in Sorrento, Italy, where his son, from whom he is estranged, and her daughter are about to be married.

In the U.S. to promote the film, Bier, 53, said she and her regular collaborator, Anders Thomas Jensen, were regularly approached “to do something on the topic of cancer. You get scripts that deal with cancer as an autobiographical story. But we were not going to make a movie that suffocated an audience with that.”

Still, making a romantic comedy that starts from so sad a place is, well, unusual. Bier disagrees. “I don’t think it’s sad. It has depth. I think in America, you have a more narrow definition of romantic comedy than we do in Europe. In Europe, it’s slightly broader.”

In the U.S., she says, a rom-com is a romance with laughs; in Europe, these films are more character driven.

“Ida is built a little on my mom,” Bier says. “She had breast cancer twice, but she was always a very positive figure. For her, the glass was always at least half full. When she came into a room, the light became a little stronger. We were thinking a lot of her when we wrote [Ida].”

Even Pierce Brosnan is a little sad sackish. She cast him rather than a Danish actor “because I felt this character would gain a lot from being lonely in all manner of speaking.”

Not only widowed and estranged from his child, “he also was lonely in Denmark, where he felt kind of alienated. Then I thought for Ida, the main [female] character, who had lost everything, by the end...”

Heels Over Head
DIA lecture ties yoga to glorious works of art, one with a Detroit connection.

Suzanne Chessler
Contributing Writer

Debra Diamond has researched aesthetic connections to yoga and will talk about them Sunday afternoon, June 2, at the Detroit Institute of Arts.

Diamond, curator of South Asian art at the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery and Freer Gallery of Art at the Smithsonian Institution, will reference Detroit findings as she discusses “Heels Over Head: Mr. Freer, Swami Vivekananda, and the Art of Yoga.”

The presentation will preview an upcoming Smithsonian exhibition, “Yoga: The Art of Transformation,” the first display of the discipline’s visual history. The presentation also will cover the Detroit presence in that exhibition.

“I’m going to tie my talk to really sublime or funny yoga images, the meanings of yoga and how it intersected with American life,” Diamond says.

The exhibit will include a 10th-century sculpture of a fierce yogini, which will be on loan from the DIA, and Thomas Edison’s film Hindoo Fakir, which has to do with a time when many thought yogis were like magicians.

Of special interest in the talk will be tales of the visit of Swami Vivekananda to Charles Lang Freer’s Detroit home in 1894. The swami reformed yoga as part of the reformation of Hinduism and brought it to the United States, where his ideas of yoga were presented as rational, ecumenical and democratic.

Freer (1854-1919), who made his fortune in railroad freight car manufacturing, collected Asian and American art ultimately donated to the Smithsonian. His home, ranked as one of the most important historic buildings in Michigan, holds the Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute.

“Because three research paths came together in Detroit, I was excited to see if I could do something about using Detroit as a lens for looking at the history of yoga, the way yoga came to America and the formation of what modern yoga is,” says Diamond, who curated the Smithsonian display to include more than 120 works dating from the third to the early-20th century. There will be temple sculptures, devotional icons, illustrated manuscripts, court paintings, colonial and early modern photographs, books and films.

Diamond’s recent research papers and talks have explored changes in yogic ideas as they moved across sectarian borders and into material culture.

“There are a lot of aspects of modern yoga that are modern, and there are aspects that are quite ancient,” explains Diamond, whose Jewish background and interest in meditation informed her appreciation for the subject matter.

“Some yoga traditions have been non-sectarian, while others have been created within religious traditions. The way yoga has moved in and out of religious bases and across borders is an important thread in learning.”

Debra Diamond will speak at 2 p.m. Sunday, June 2, at the Detroit Institute of Arts before appearing 3:30-5 p.m. at a reception and tour of Detroit’s Freer House, 71 E. Ferry. The lecture is free with DIA admission. The reception is $10, $5 for students and Freer House members. (313) 664-2509; rmfoster@wayne.edu.