**The Ciesla Foundation**

**presents**

**The Latest Documentary**

**From Award-Winning Filmmaker Aviva Kempner**

***THE SPY BEHIND HOME PLATE***

**THE REAL STORY OF MOE BERG,**

 **MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL PLAYER TURNED WWII SPY**

**http://spybehindhomeplate.org/**

**From the director**

 **of *Rosenwald* and**

***The Life and Times of Hank Greenberg***

**Opening Day May 24, 2019 for National Theatrical Release**

**Running Time: 101 minutes**

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**SHORT SYNOPSIS**

Aviva Kempner’s ***The Spy Behind Home Plate*** is the first feature-length documentary to tell the real story of Morris “Moe” Berg, the enigmatic and brilliant Jewish baseball player turned spy. Berg caught and fielded in the major leagues during baseball’s Golden Age in the 1920s and 1930s. But very few people know that Berg also worked for the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), spying in Europe and playing a prominent role in America’s efforts to undermine the German atomic bomb program during WWII.

***The Spy Behind Home Plate*** reveals the life of this unknown Jewish hero through rare historical footage and photographs as well as revealing interviews with an All-Star roster of celebrities and other individuals from the worlds of sports, spycraft, and history. Berg may have had only a .243 batting average during his 15-year major league career, but it was the stats he collected for the OSS that made him a most valuable player to his country during World War II.

**LONG SYNOPSIS**

Aviva Kempner’s ***The Spy Behind Home Plate*** is the first feature-length documentary to tell the real story of Morris “Moe” Berg, the enigmatic and brilliant Jewish baseball player turned spy. Berg caught and fielded in the major leagues during baseball’s Golden Age in the 1920s and 1930s. But very few people know that Berg also worked for the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), spying in Europe and playing a prominent role in America’s efforts to undermine the German atomic bomb program during WWII.

***The Spy Behind Home Plate*** reveals the life of this unknown Jewish hero through rare historical footage and photographs as well as revealing contemporary and past interviews with an All-Star roster of celebrities and other individuals from the worlds of sports, spycraft, and WWII history.

Among the contemporary interviewees are authors Robert Fitts, David Ignatius, and Thomas Powers, baseball executives Jerry Reinsdorf and Bud Selig, biographer Nicholas Davidoff, film professor Annette Insdorf, Los Angeles Angels manager Brad Ausmus, MLB historian John Thorn, OSS Society president Charles Pinck, playwright Michael Frayn, sports columnist Ira Berkow, sports commentator Larry Merchant, and U.S. Senator Edward Markey.

The film follows Berg, who was the son of Jewish immigrants, from his roots growing up in Newark, New Jersey. An erudite scholar, he spoke a multitude of languages, earned degrees from Princeton University, Columbia Law School, and attended the Sorbonne.

As a major league catcher and fielder, he played on five different teams during baseball’s Golden Age – for the Brooklyn Robins (which became the Dodgers), the Chicago White Sox, the Cleveland Indians, the Washington Senators, and the Boston Red Sox. In 1934, Berg joined the All Americans Baseball Team for an All-Star exhibition tour in Japan with Hall of Famers Babe Ruth, Jimmie Foxx, Lefty Gomez, Charlie Gehringer, and Lou Gehrig. The film features footage from the Japan trip taken by the players themselves - Foxx, Gomez, and Berg.

Berg may have had only a .243 batting average during his 15-year major league career, but ***The Spy Behind Home Plate*** shows that it was the stats he collected for the OSS that made him a most valuable player to his country during WWII.

Berg was selected by the OSS for a mission to interview top Italian physicists to assess their knowledge of the German bomb program. He was also involved in missions to undermine the German bomb program.

In 1944, the OSS assigned him to attend a lecture by German physicist Werner Heisenberg in Zurich. For the Swiss trip, Berg was given a gun and a cyanide pill and was instructed to shoot Heisenberg if he was constructing a bomb for the Nazis. He determined that Germany was not developing an atomic bomb after hearing Heisenberg give a lecture and speaking to him privately. His dangerous mission aided the advancement of the Manhattan Project.

***The Spy Behind Home Plate*** was greatly enriched by incorporating eighteen interviews conducted from 1987 to 1991 by filmmakers Jerry Feldman and Neil Goldstein for *The Best Gloveman in the League,* whichwas never completed*.* Their interviews were archived at Princeton, and The Ciesla Foundation supported digitizing them for use in ***The Spy Behind Home Plate*.**

Their archival interviews include: Moe’s brother, Dr. Sam Berg; Berg’s fellow players center fielder Dom DiMaggio, and pitchers Elden Auker and Joseph Cascarella; fellow OSS members Horace Calvert, William Colby, and John Lansdale.

Two interviews with former OSS members, Earl Brodie and Edwin Putzell, conducted by ESPN for its *SportsCentury-Moe Berg* were also included.

***The Spy Behind Home Plate* Interviewees**

Among the contemporary interviewees are authors Robert Fitts, David Ignatius, and Thomas Powers, baseball executives Jerry Reinsdorf and Bud Selig, biographer Nicholas Davidoff, film professor Annette Insdorf, Los Angeles Angels manager Brad Ausmus, MLB historian John Thorn, OSS Society president Charles Pinck, playwright Michael Frayn, sports columnist Ira Berkow, sports commentator Larry Merchant, and U.S. Senator Edward Markey.

Bruce Adams, Senators Fan

Brad Ausmus, LA Angels Manager

Irwin Berg, Cousin of Moe Berg

Ira Berkow, Sports Columnist

Stan Bernard, Journalist

Jonathan Blank, Director, Jewish Baseball Western Wall of Fame

William "Bill" Corvo, Son of OSS member Max Corvo

Nicholas Dawidoff, Author, *The Catcher Was a Spy*

Paul J. Ferri, Son of rocket scientist Antonio Ferri

Robert Fitts, Author, *Banzai Babe Ruth: Baseball, Espionage, and Assassination during the 1934 Tour of Japan*

Franklin Foer, Writer, *The Atlantic*

Ray Errol Fox, Writer

Michael Frayn, Playwright, *Copenhagen*

Neil Goldstein, Filmmaker

Vernona Gomez, Daughter of Lefty Gomez

Jochen Heisenberg, son of Werner Heisenberg

David Ignatius, *Washington Post* Columnist

Annette Insdorf, Columbia University Film Professor

Paul Wyant Kahn, Son of Estella Huni

Robert Kaplan, Producer

Senator Edward Markey, U.S. Senator from Massachusetts

Hywel Maslen, Historian

Robert Matthews, Collector

Linda McCarthy, Founder, CIA Museum

Thomas R. McDonough, Astrophysicist and Author, *Moe Berg, The Secret Files*

Larry Merchant, Sports Commentator

Aviva Miller, Producer

Frank Monteleone, WWII Radio Operator (Deceased)

Borden Painter, Professor of History

Charles Pinck, President of the OSS Society

David Povich, son of Sports Columnist Shirley Povich

Thomas Powers, Author of *Heisenberg's War: The Secret History of the German Bomb*

Jerry Reinsdorf, Owner of Chicago White Sox

Ray Robinson, Sportswriter (Deceased)

Bud Selig, Commissioner Emeritus of MLB

Denise Shames, Cousin of Moe Berg

George Solomon, Sports Editor

Harvey Solomon, Screenwriter and Author, *Such Splendid Prisons*

Julia Ruth Stevens, Daughter of Babe Ruth (deceased)

Alan Swyer, Filmmaker

Hank Thomas, Grandson of Walter Johnson

John Thorn, MLB Historian

Alex Wellerstein, Historian of Science

Richard Willing, Intelligence Analyst

**ESPN** **ARCHIVAL INTERVIEWEES**

Two interviews with former OSS members, Earl Brodie and Edwin Putzell, conducted by ESPN for its *SportsCentury-Moe Berg* were also included.

Earl Brodie, OSS Agent

Edwin Putzell, Executive Officer to Head of OSS William Donovan

**PrincetonArchival Interviewees**

**The Spy Behind Home Plate** was greatly enriched by incorporating eighteen interviews conducted from 1987 to 1991 by filmmakers Jerry Feldman and Neil Goldstein for “THE BEST GLOVEMAN IN THE LEAGUE”, which was never completed.

“THE BEST GLOVEMAN IN THE LEAGUE” archival interview footage was supported by a grant from the American Film Institute with additional support for the New Jersey Network, their supporters and sponsors along with additional assistance from Virginia “Ginny” Berg.

The interviews are archived at Princeton, and The Ciesla Foundation supported digitizing them for use in **The Spy Behind Home Plate.**

Elden Auker, Pitcher

Sam Berg, Brother of Moe Berg

Warren Berg, Friend of Moe Berg

Bob Broeg, Sportswriter

Horace Calvert, OSS Liaison Officer

Joseph Cascarella, Pitcher

William Colby, OSS Agent, Former Director of CIA

Dom DiMaggio, Center Fielder

Robert Furman, Assistant to General Groves

Stanley Goldberg, Historian of Science

Don Griffin, Princeton Classmate

John Lansdale, OSS Agent

I.M. Levitt, Astronomer

Bruce Old, Naval Intelligence Officer (Deceased)

Tommy Thomas, Pitcher

Charlie Wagner, Pitcher

Monte Weaver, Pitcher

**Director’s Statement**

Life-size wall hangings of my three favorite Jewish baseball players—Sandy Koufax pitching to Hank Greenberg and Moe Berg as catcher—adorn the curved wall of my home’s staircase. I was so proud of making *The* *Life and Times of Hank Greenberg* because he was a Jewish hero during times of teeming anti-Semitism in America and while the Nazis were raging in Europe.

Businessman William Levine asked me after seeing *The Life and Times of Hank Greenberg* "do you want to make a film on an unusual major league baseball player?" Levine pointed out that "Moe Berg was a great subject because he became a spy for the OSS during World War II, helping to defeat the Nazis." I jumped at his generous offer to support a Berg bio film. ***The Spy Behind Home Plate*** fits perfectly into my goal to make historical documentaries about under known Jewish heroes and my career focus on exploring courageous tales about those who fought the Nazis.

The biographical details of early Moe’s life are just fascinating. Even as a young boy Berg exhibited covert-like tactics when he used a false name in order to play on a youth church team and while playing baseball at Princeton, Berg gave signals in Latin and Sanskrit.

Berg’s immigrant father wanted his son to take advantage of the opportunities in America and become a lawyer. How sad is it that Berg’s father never watched him play in even one major league game?

We explore the extent of Berg’s brilliance and why he was called the *brainiest* man in baseball. His command of languages, foreign affairs, and esoteric subjects made him a unique player. He displayed his knowledge and boosted the popularity of baseball by appearing on a popular radio show and writing a scholarly piece on the theories behind pitching and catching for *The Atlantic*.

I am in awe of how he used his 1934 trip to Tokyo to gather intelligence about militaristic Japan and his many courageous OSS missions in Italy and Switzerland geared towards preventing the Nazis from developing the atomic bomb.

There are many myths and tall tales about Moe’s activities during the war, including the claim that he parachuted into Yugoslavia and met with partisan leader Tito. After extensive archival research, we found no evidence of this claim. Unfortunately, this story is featured in several museums and exhibits.

For decades different writers and directors have tried to tell the story of the thrilling life of Moe Berg. I am proud to have made the first fact-based, feature-length documentary, ***The Spy Behind Home Plate,*** that does his life justice. I also think the courage and accomplishments of the OSS, our too short-lived intelligence agency, should inspire numerous feature films, more documentaries, and even a heroic television series.

I am thrilled that Moe Berg is finally achieving the recognition he so deserves for his courage and service as a spy during World War II. Clearly, Berg is the American hero we all need to know more about!

**Timeline Of Moe Berg’s Life**

**1902** Berg is born on March 2nd in New York City.

**1910**  Berg family moves to Newark, New Jersey.

**1923** Berg graduates from Princeton University, joins Brooklyn Robins/Brooklyn Dodgers.

**1924-25** Berg plays in the Minors. The Brooklyn Robin’s option him to minor-league Minneapolis Millers who in turn, in August, send him to the Toledo Mud Hens. Mike Gonzalez, files four-word report: “Good field, no hit.”

**1925** Berg enrolled in Columbia Law School, skips White Sox spring training and early part of the baseball season.

**1926-30** Berg plays for the Chicago White Sox as shortstop.

**1927** In February, Berg is back in law school and asks Charles Comiskey for permission to join team again after classes and exams, but Comiskey says no.

**1930** Graduates from Columbia Law School and passes the Bar

**1931** Berg is traded to the Cleveland Indians.

**1932** Berg signs with the Washington Senators.

**1932** Berg travels to Japan to teach baseball fundamentals with Ted Lyons and Lefty O’Doul.

**1934** Berg sets American League record by catching in 117 consecutive games without making an error, from 1931 to 1934 for Chicago, Cleveland, and Washington.

**1934** Berg is picked up by Cleveland Indians.

**1934** Berg joins the All Americans Baseball Team for an All-Star exhibition tour in Japan with Hall of Famers Babe Ruth, Jimmie Foxx, Lefty Gomez, Charlie Gehringer, and Lou Gehrig.

**1935**-**39** Berg is a player for the Boston Red Sox.

**1938** Berg appears on *Information Please*, a national radio quiz program, and becomes a national sensation.

**1939** Berg’s 15th year as a major league player

**1940-41**  Berg becomes a coach for the Red Sox.

**1941**  Moe writes *Atlantic Monthly* article, *Pitchers and Catchers.*

**1942** In January, Berg retires from Red Sox and takes a position with the Office of Inter-American Affairs.

**1942** In February, Berg makes a speech in Japanese to the people of Japan, asking for peace.

**1942** Begins “Goodwill” tour of Central and South America in August reporting to Nelson Rockefeller on the political situation.

**1943** Berg becomes a member of the OSS.

**1943** General Groves, head of Manhattan Project, launches an effort to locate Heisenberg and discover how far along Germans are to manufacturing a bomb. Berg joins this mission.

**1943** Berg travels to Italy to extract Italian scientists.

**1944** Berg attends Heisenberg’s lecture in Zurich to determine if the Nazis were building an atomic bomb.

**1946** Berg declines Medal of Freedom.

**1972** Berg dies on May 29th in Belleville, New Jersey. His final words are “How did the Mets do today?”

**2018**  Berg and the 13,000 heroic men and women of the OSS finally receive a well-deserved Congressional Gold Medal during a moving ceremony where Berg’s heroism was cited.

**About The Filmmakers**

**Aviva Kempner, Director/Producer/Writer**

Aviva Kempner has a mission in life. She makes films that investigate non-stereotypical images of Jews in history and celebrate the untold stories of Jewish heroes. To her list of those heroes, she has now added Moe Berg.

Based in Washington, D.C., Kempner, a director-writer-producer dynamo, boasts a resume of critically acclaimed and award-winning documentaries, including *Rosenwald,* *Yoo-Hoo, Mrs. Goldberg*, and Peabody winner *The Life and Times of Hank Greenberg*. She also produced another WWII documentary, *Partisans of Vilna*.

Child of a U.S. Army officer Harold Kempner and Polish Holocaust survivor Helen Ciesla, Kempner was born in post-World War II Berlin, Germany. Her family history inspired her to make these films about under-known Jewish heroes--television pioneer Gertrude Berg, Hall of Fame baseball superstar Hank Greenberg, philanthropist Julius Rosenwald, and the Jewish resistance to the Nazis. Her films have received top honors from The National Society of Film Critics, the New York Film Critics Circle, the Broadcast Film Critics Association, and CINE Golden Eagle and Peabody Awards.

Kempner is a member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and is an avid voting rights advocate for the District of Columbia. She writes film criticism and feature articles for numerous publications.

**Alison J. Richards, Associate Producer**

Alison Richards has worked in documentary film and television production and research since 2001. She was most recently the associate producer for the special DVD package of Aviva Kempner’s historical documentary, *Rosenwald*, which includes over four hours of bonus features and an educational packet.

Richards was associate producer of NOVA’s *Spies that Fly*, a history of unmanned aerial vehicles. Her work in research and production also includes Smithsonian’s *Stories from the Vaults* with Tom Cavanagh, a behind-the-scenes look at the Smithsonian Institution, the world’s largest museum complex; the WGBH Emmy Award-winning story, *Why the Towers Fell*, about the collapse of the World Trade Center; NOVA’s *Bioterror: Coping with the New Reality*; the WGBH Peabody award-winning series *Building Big with David Macaulay: Bridges, Domes, Skyscrapers, Dams, Tunnels*; and the independent film, *Tale of the Tongs*.

Richards received a Master’s in Film from American University and a certificate in CopyrightX from Harvard’s Berkman Center for Internet and Society.

**Barbara Ballow, Editor**

Barbara Ballow is an award-winning editor who has been telling compelling stories for over thirty years. She has edited films and videos on topics as diverse as tango dancing to PTSD, and for a variety of organizations, including Conservation International, The Hewlett Foundation, and the World Bank. Her films have appeared on PBS, HBO, National Geographic and CBS, and in film festivals around the world.

**John Keltonic, Composer**

John Keltonic has been composing original music for television and films for over twenty years. Credits include NBC, PBS, Discovery Channel, BBC, Learning Channel, and CNN. Programs featuring Keltonic’s music have won national Emmys and have been nominated for an Academy Award.

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**Photos available at spybehindhomeplate.org**