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## Arts Beat

# Praying with Lior

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**M**eet Lior Liebling. He is a Philadelphia teen with Down syndrome and the subject of the documentary film "Praying With Lior," which opens March 28. Lior is the son of two rabbis and he loves to pray, sing and worship, so much so that people around him wonder if he is a "spiritual genius." The film follows Lior and his family as they prepare for his bar mitzvah.

"If there is a God, Lior is definitely closer to God than anyone else I know," says his older brother, Yoni, in the film.

"Praying With Lior" is the first film for 36-year-old Rockville native Ilana Trachtman, who produces children's television programs. Trachtman met Lior while she was in synagogue celebrating the Jewish new year. She was drawn to a joyful (and off key) singing voice behind her.

"I turned around and I was surprised I was looking at a kid, and a kid with Down syndrome," she says. "Someone told me, 'Oh, that kid's going to be having his bar mitzvah.' I thought it would make a great movie."

Lior's family agreed to participate in the documentary and she filmed the Lieblings' lives for about six months in 2004. In a scene at Lior's private Jewish school, he tries to inspire his bored-looking classmates during prayer by roaming the aisles,

clapping and singing. Trachtman weaves in footage of Lior's mother, Rabbi Devorah Bartnoff, who died of breast cancer in 1997.

The film played in December at the Washington Jewish Film Festival.

*Praying With Lior starts March 28 at the Avalon Theatre, 5612 Connecticut Ave. NW. \$7-\$9.75. 202-966-6000.*

**Rockville native and "Praying with Lior" director Ilana Trachtman, left, filmed the lives of Lior Liebling, above, and his family for about six months in 2004. The documentary focuses on the bar mitzvah of the Philadelphia teen with Down syndrome.**

