

The
**WOMEN'S
BALCONY**

Monday, October 2, 7:30 pm

Reviewed by Kenneth Turan / LA Times Not Rated 96 Mins.

It sounds paradoxical, but it's often true that the more culturally precise a foreign language film is, the more universal its appeal becomes. This is very much the case with the charming but pointed "The Women's Balcony."



A major box-office success in Israel, "The Women's Balcony" is so seemingly site-specific that even its driving force, screenwriter Shlomit Nehama, was surprised when it began succeeding overseas.

But culture aside, this is an unapologetically warmhearted comedic drama, a fine example of commercial filmmaking grounded in a persuasive knowledge of human behavior.

As the title indicates, "The Women's Balcony" is set in an Orthodox Jewish community in Jerusalem. But though that world may seem monolithic to outsiders, as Nehama and director Emil Ben-Shimon well understand, there is a genuine rift there, a clash of cultures often unspoken and unacknowledged that the film has adroitly mined.

At first, however, everything is supremely festive, as the members of a small neighborhood Orthodox community, the kind of close-knit group in which everyone inevitably knows everyone else's business, gather to celebrate the bar mitzvah of the grandson of

Under the leadership of a venerable but still beloved rabbi, things are going splendidly when a mishap strikes: The building's balcony, the place where women pray in sex-segregated Orthodox services, suddenly collapses, leaving the rabbi's wife hospitalized and the rabbi himself in retreat from reality.

Very much in disarray, the congregation finds a new temporary space in a location that makes finding a minyan, the 10 men needed for daily prayers, difficult. Enter the young and charismatic Rabbi David (Aviv Alush), a can-do individual who teaches at a

local seminary and takes on the congregation's well-being as a personal project.

Rabbi David is so eager to help he even offers to cut through the annoying red tape and supervise the rebuilding of the collapsed synagogue.

"Thank the Creator," he modestly tells the grateful congregants. "I am only the messenger."

Discerning eyes will notice, however, that Rabbi David's dress marks him as ultra-Orthodox, while the congregation, whose female members do not cover their hair, is what might be called modern Orthodox: definitely observant but without the accompanying zealotry. That may seem like a small difference, but it turns out it is not.

Things get complicated when Rabbi David gives the men in the congregation a stirring speech about purity that does not go down well with the wives. Then the new rebuilt synagogue is unveiled and all hell breaks loose.

For under Rabbi David's supervision the airy balcony of old has been eliminated and the women are squeezed into a claustrophobic auxiliary space. And worse is yet to come.

But if the men think that the women will agree with Rabbi David that this is all an expression of God's will, they very quickly realize their mistake.

Screenwriter Nehama, who grew up in an Orthodox Jerusalem community like the one in the film, has said her goal was "to tell the story of the moderate people who are forced to deal with growing religious extremism," and "The Women's Balcony" definitely does that.

But Nehama has also said that she was inspired by British movies about the misadventures of small-town life, such as the charming "Waking Ned Devine," and the way she has made her serious societal points in an audience-friendly format is the key to this film's success.

Following the peregrinations of numerous characters, including the happily married Etti and Zion, Yaffa (Yafit Asulin), a young woman looking for a husband, and the tough-minded Tikva (top Israeli comedian Orna Banai), "Balcony" very much includes us in the community's warmth and caring.



As smoothly directed by Ben-Shimon, a filmmaker best known for his television work, and enlivened by a fine Ahuva Ozeri score, the plot twists can mostly be seen coming. But as performed by a cast of practiced farceurs, that is part of its charm.

When one character says, "Everyone should take care of his own account with God," that is a message that resonates as well.

In Hebrew with English subtitles.

SAY IT IN EIGHT STUDENT FILM FESTIVAL



Monday, October 16, 5:00 pm

Please join us as we feature the winning entries from the 15th Annual Student Film Festival. Participants were required to submit a completed film with a running time of 8 minutes or less. Over 100 submissions from 16 countries around the world were received and evaluated by our panel of accomplished judges, Bob Fritz, John Mostacci, and Tony Venezia. These individuals were selected based on their solid background in the world of film. Between them, they possess over 150 years of experience working in film production and education.

The festival's top selections will be screened and awards will be distributed at this special program.



Monday, October 16, 7:30 pm

Reviewed by Maia Silber / Washington Post *Rated R* *89 Mins.*

Director William Oldroyd's debut feature "Lady Macbeth" returns, again and again, to a single shot: Florence Pugh, as Katherine, a young woman forced into a loveless marriage with a sexually dysfunctional and abusive heir to a coal mine, sits perfectly still on a couch, smoothing the thick folds of her blue gown and staring straight ahead. Her face betrays no sign of the pent-up rage, wild lust or coldblooded determination that, alternately, motivate her. A cat jumps down from a cabinet. She remains motionless.

This image, this woman, is familiar. She is Catherine Earnshaw of "Wuthering Heights," swearing "I am Heathcliff." She is Emma Bovary and Lady Chatterley: passionate and stifled. And, of course, she's Lady Macbeth, asking the spirits to turn her breast milk into poison. (Although there are other parallels with "Macbeth," the film is not, strictly speaking, an adaptation of the Shakespearean tragedy.) Oldroyd's brilliance (and Pugh's) is to probe this age-old archetype — the Gothic antiheroine, the adulteress — and find pathos and cruelty. It's also to uncover the complex web of hierarchies — of race and class, as well as gender — that ensnare and empower her.

Adapted by screenwriter Alice Birch from "Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk," an 1865 novella by Russian author Nikolai Leskov, "Lady

Macbeth" opens in a 19th-century English countryside of dense forests and raging winds. But most of the film's action takes place inside the stark manor house of Katherine's father-in-law, where every object — and every resident — has its place. Power passes among the members of the household like a poison arrow, its path shifting but its aim true.

Early in the film, after his father mocks him at dinner, Katherine's new husband (Paul Hilton) orders her to stand still while he masturbates. "Don't smile," he says. "Take off your dress. Face the wall." Later, Katherine, after discovering her husband's workers humiliating Anna, a black maid, gives them a similar order: "Don't smile. Face the wall." (She's angry, by the way, not because of what they're doing, but because they're doing it on her husband's time.)

When Katherine begins an affair with one of those workers, the dark-skinned Sebastian (Cosmo Jarvis), it seems as though their passion might upend the rigid hierarchy of the house. We watch Pugh become more confident and more sensual, her eyes and skin growing brighter, her laugh more defiant. When her stern father-in-law (Christopher Fairbank) asks where her husband has gone, she shrugs: "Wherever you put him," she says, raising an eyebrow. But as Katherine resorts to increasingly desperate means to sustain her relationship with Sebastian, her irreverence morphs into ruthlessness. Rather than upend hierarchy, she enforces it, controlling and crushing those less powerful than her.

Anna, sensitively played by Naomi Ackie, acts as the film's conscience and Katherine's foil. Like a reflection in a funhouse mirror, she shrinks as Katherine grows — and becomes more ferocious. And as the mistress expresses her desires and demands, the maid becomes mute, traumatized into silence. And as Katherine's behavior becomes more extreme, Anna can only channel her fear and rage into the dough she kneads in the kitchen. Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth frames unnamed servants for Duncan's murder, placing bloody daggers on their sleeping bodies. Anna, without speaking a word, gives voice to their suffering. Vaulting ambition topples not only kings, it seems, but also the powerless.



In "Lady Macbeth," Oldroyd never allows us to look away from the horror, focusing, in long, intense shots, on the faces of his characters as they suffer. But he turns our attention, often, toward subtler actions: white curtains fluttering, a spoon gently tapping a glass, that prowling cat. These delicate movements, juxtaposed against violent acts, force us to consider the brutality embedded in the quiet domesticity of the manor house.

TIVOLI THEATRE

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\$6 After Hours Members | \$10 Non-Members

BIG SONIA



Monday, November 6, 7:30 pm

By Leah Warshawski / Co-Director *Not Rated* *76 Mins.*

My husband and I were in Shanghai recently (at a few international schools) screening our last film (Finding Hillywood) and showing a clip from our new film in production, Big Sonia. Halfway through the clip you see the number tattooed on Sonia's forearm as she's arranging scarves in her tailor shop. When the clip was over we asked students to raise their hands if they knew what the tattoo meant. We were shocked when less than 50% of the students raised their hands. We asked, "How many people know what the Holocaust was?" and we got the same response – glazed over stares and silence. One 15-year-old boy said, "It's that Jewish thing, right?"

Although this response to our film was disappointing, we left that school with a renewed sense of purpose and validation to tell Sonia's story now, before all of the Holocaust survivors are gone. This year marks the 70th anniversary of Sonia's liberation from Bergen-Belsen and her 90th birthday in November – so it's a BIG year.

As a teenager she watched her mother go to the gas chamber and survived three concentration camps by using what she calls her "sixth sense." On liberation day she was shot through the chest, and the bullet missed her heart by an inch – miraculously she survived. She's currently the only living survivor in Kansas City who talks about her wartime experience in public – to churches, schools, prisons – and anyone who will listen.

Sonia's kitchen table is covered with hundreds of hand-written thank-you notes from the middle and high-school students she speaks to. One says, "My mom and I never really get along. But after I listened to you speak, I realized that I should treat my parents better. Thank you for changing my life." In addition to speaking engagements around KS, Sonia drives herself to work six days a week at her late husband's tailor shop, where there's always a steady stream of customers (of all ages, races, and cultures) waiting to see her. They bring their tailoring, but they also come for the "experience" and for Sonia's stories. Knowing Sonia – even for 10 minutes – puts things in perspective.

But Sonia didn't always speak about the Holocaust so openly. Growing up, I remember seeing the tattoo on her arm and

wondering what it meant. Sonia immersed herself in her tailor shop after her husband died and I remember going to visit her at work. She would make my sister and I try on all her scarves and feed us strange Polish candies, but we never spoke that much about her past. The shop became her "reason for being" and since she's a "people person" it was a perfect way for her to stay connected and busy.

As one of the last survivors, Sonia is passing her legacy on by describing her tragic and horrific past, and asking people to be better.

Then, about 10 years ago, my aunt Regina (Sonia's eldest daughter) researched our family history and put together a PowerPoint presentation that described the chronology of Sonia's past with timelines and photos. At the same time, Sonia was starting to feel like the world has not changed much since her teenage years – there is still bullying, discrimination, and hate – and she was extremely frustrated. She decided that it was time to tell her story as a witness in hopes that the younger generation will learn from the past to make the world better for the future. Now, Regina and Sonia give a joint presentation that is in very high-demand.



As one of the last survivors, Sonia is passing her legacy on by describing her tragic and horrific past, and asking people to be better. Over the course of filming for BIG SONIA during the last few years, we have been able to film the impact Sonia has in the world. One student we've been following for three years (since the first time she heard Sonia speak) has recently decided to start her own foundation to combat bullying and discrimination in schools. This is the impact we were hoping for!

Sonia is a unique woman in a dying generation, and making a film about her has allowed me to get to know her in a completely different and more genuine way than I ever imagined. She's a wounded healer who I'm proud to call my grandmother.

Please join us for our thought provoking post screening discussions!

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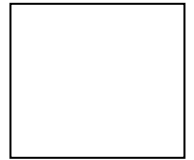
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NATIONAL
arts&humanities
MONTH

Join the coast-to-coast collective recognition of the importance of culture in America this October: go to a museum, see a play, take a class in creative writing, dance, paint and enjoy the arts with people you love! Support the arts and help raise awareness of their impact on our lives and in our community.



"Joyous!"

Variety

Monday, October 2 at 7:30 pm



SAY IT IN 8
STUDENT FILM FESTIVAL

"An international delight!"

Monday, October 16 at 7:30 pm

"A seductive mix of sex and murder."

The Hollywood Reporter

Monday, October 16 at 7:30 pm



BIG SONIA

"Such a beautiful documentary...an unexpected and vital exploration...in a time we need it most. I love Sonia!"

Rosie O'Donnell

Monday, November 6 at 7:30 pm