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SECOND CITY TZIVI'S SNEAK PEEKS

Coming Next Month in the Chicago Festival of Israeli Cinema:



- **FIVE DAYS**
- **JOY**
- **KIBBUTZ**
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SECOND CITY TZIVI'S SNEAK PEEK
Coming Next Month in the Chicago Festival of Israeli Cinema:

KIBBUTZ



Special for Chicago Jewish Community Online
by Jan Lisa Huttner

“Dozens of people were injured throughout the day Friday, as Katyusha rockets landed in the Galilee. Injuries were reported in Nahariya, Yesod Hama'alah, Kfar Szold, Kibbutz Hulata, Safed, Peki'in and Hatzor Haglilit.”

Ha'aretz; Sunday, July 16, 2006

At one point in Racheli Schwartz's new documentary **KIBBUTZ**, someone comments that border kibbutzim like Hulata once served a defensive purpose, but that role was far in the past. Oops; this is clearly another case in which current events give new significance to some of the choices made months earlier by members of our CFIC program committee.

Racheli Schwartz is a well-known and well-respected director of documentary films. **KIBBUTZ** is her 20th doc; the first one, released in 1985, was called **POVERTY IN ISRAEL**. Her work has received several Wolgin Awards from multiple Jerusalem Film Festival juries, and it's been shown in many European and North American film festivals as well.

Most of Schwartz's films focus on women. For example, in **BRACHA AND MASHA** (1998) she tells the story of two elderly women displaced by a fire in their nursing home, and in **LETTERS TO GERTA** (2004), she tells the story of a Holocaust survivor asked to donate one of her few remaining childhood possessions to Yad Vashem. I haven't seen either of these films; I only know about them from the descriptions on Schwartz's website (<http://galproductions.com>). But watching **KIBBUTZ**, I think her interest in these subjects becomes very clear.

When Schwartz was child growing up in Hulata, the kibbutz movement as a whole was thriving. Kibbutzniks were national leaders in both the government and the military, and their mythical status as the founders of the state of Israel was beyond challenge. Kibbutz women were an especially unique breed – with strong limbs and brown skin from working in the fields, they eschewed superficial feminine frills and also repressed deep-seated maternal longings in their quest for full equality. These were the women who raised Schwartz, and they were her earliest role models.

Like “Aleksii Prelapsarianov” the character known as “the oldest living Bolshevik” whose passionate soliloquy opens the second half of Tony Kushner’s masterpiece ANGELS IN AMERICA, these women were also true believers, and they pose a similar challenge to audiences watching KIBBUTZ today:

"Change? Yes, we must change, only show me the Theory, and I will be at the barricades, show me the book of the next Beautiful Theory, and I promise you that these blind eyes will see again, just to devour that text. Show me the words that will reorder the world, or else keep silent... If a snake sheds his skin before a new skin is ready, naked he will be in the world, prey to the forces of chaos. Without his skin, he will be dismantled, lose coherence and die. Have you, my little serpents, a new skin?"

The strongest moments in KIBBUTZ feature three elderly women who function as a “Greek Chorus,” putting Hulata’s current concerns into historical context. Lifelong friends and comrades, Batya, Chaya, and Tova are Prelapsarianov’s sisters, but Chava is now a clerk in Hulata’s business office so she knows lots of little secrets. She laughs about receipts for cosmetics, for example, the use of which was once so socially unacceptable, but at lunch with her friends they admit that their chosen path was a difficult one. “I pulled off all kinds of tricks to be with my children,” says Tova. “There are feelings of guilt without a doubt,” agrees Batya. But despite all their personal sacrifices, back-breaking work, and radical intentions, Kibbutz Hulata has imploded, and by 2000, when the narrative begins, life as Batya, Chaya, and Tova once knew it is long over.

I’d like to tell you that KIBBUTZ is an A+ doc, but I can’t. Yehuda Naor’s suicide in May 2000 was undoubtedly the catalytic event that set Schwartz’s agenda, but opening with this tragedy makes everything that follows it feel way too portentous and melodramatic. Furthermore, you need to bring your own background knowledge to KIBBUTZ in order to fully appreciate Schwartz’s story. Non-Jewish audiences in general and Jewish-Americans under 40 probably won’t have much appreciation for what the loss of kibbutzim like Hulata truly represents. But Jewish boomers like me who can fill in the gaps with personal memories will probably be very moved. (I know I was pretty bad at picking peaches, but I remember doing a reasonable job in the kibbutz factory, where I assembled irrigation system components in my day.)

If I ruled the world, I’d show KIBBUTZ as a double-feature with NO LONGER 17, Isaac Zepel Yeshrun’s wonderful narrative feature about another imploding kibbutz. NO LONGER 17 played here as part of Chicago’s 2004 Israel Film Festival and is now available on DVD from Amazon, Netflix, etc.

The KIBBUTZ screening is scheduled for 5 PM on Thursday September 14 at the Landmark's Renaissance Place Cinema in Highland Park. [Click here for complete details](#) about this year's Chicago Festival of Israeli Cinema.

Tziviah bat Yisroel v'Hudah (Jan Lisa Huttner) writes the "Second City Tzivi Spotlight" on local arts & culture, a column which appears every month in Chicago's JUF NEWS. See our September issue for additional CFIC details including Tzivi's top picks. Send your comments and/or suggestions for future columns to Tzivi@msn.com.

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