

**STRAND
RELEASING**

presents

THE OTHER STORY

**A FILM BY
AVI NESHER**

Starring Sasson Gabai and Joy Rieger

PRESS NOTES

OFFICIAL SELECTION

*Toronto International Film Festival
Chicago International Film Festival*

Country of Origin: Israel
Format: DCP/2.35/Color
Sound: Dolby 5.1 Sound
Running Time: 112 minutes
Genre: Drama
Not Rated
In Hebrew with English Subtitles

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SHORT SYNOPSIS

Strong female protagonists have been the mainstay of many Avi Neshet films. In 'The Other Story', two rebellious young women – one fleeing the chaos of secular hedonism for the disciplined comforts of faith; the other desperate to transcend her oppressive religious upbringing for sexual and spiritual freedom – cross paths unexpectedly in Jerusalem, to startling consequences.

LONG SYNOPSIS

Anat Abadi, a bright and intense young woman, long part of Tel Aviv's wild club scene, has found God. Renouncing promiscuity, pork, and smartphones for a life of solemn devotion, she moves to Jerusalem, enrolls in an ultra-orthodox seminary, and gets engaged to a charismatic musician who's also recently found religion.

Anat's grandfather Shlomo – a wary widowed psychologist and avowed old-school atheist – is shocked by his granddaughter's sudden embrace of religious zealotry and her denouncement of the family's secular ways. Shlomo is desperate to force Anat off her new path, from which there will soon be no turning back. To that end, he enlists the help of her divorced parents, Yonatan, who's left Israel years ago to pursue fame and fortune in the US only to find himself embroiled in scandal, and Tali, a successful business woman in Tel Aviv with her own scores to settle. Together they team up in plot to thwart Anat's upcoming wedding.

Meanwhile at his clinic, Shlomo is counseling a young divorcing couple, Sari and Rami Alter, who are embroiled in an explosive and bitter custody battle over their young gifted boy, Izy. In the course of treatment, Shlomo begins to unearth bizarre and troubling information about the two parents, raising concerns about the child's safety.

Before long the paths of both these troubled families will tangle in most unexpected ways, as the characters' warring personal convictions and intimate anxieties in the clash between secular and religious worldviews also come to embody the struggle for identity animating present-day Israel.

The ensuing roller coaster ride, by turns suspenseful, poignant, and humorous, that will test the strength of their resolve while offering them a last chance at a personal and family reckoning and – could it be? – a modicum of redemption.

COMMENTS FROM FILMMAKER AVI NESHER

In the old joke, a drunkard asks a sidewalk passerby for directions to the other side of the street. The passerby points across the street. "Funny," says the drunkard, "I was just there and they said it was here!"

The question of 'the other' – how to regard those outside one's own tribe – is both timeless and acutely timely. Addressing it arouses competing impulses. On one hand, an impulse for inclusion and justice, embodied in the Golden Rule, compels us to want to share fairly the bounty of this life, to make room around the table for everyone. On the other exists our deep desire to define ourselves, and our turf, with clarity and to protect our own. Definition requires setting boundaries. And boundaries always leave someone out, on the other side.

The question of 'truth' presents another, related paradox. Truth telling is widely considered a virtue. We value truthfulness in our friends. We teach our children to tell the truth. We believe that our God, and our politics for that matter, is Truth. Yet uttered unfiltered without regard for context or an eye for kindness, truth telling can serve as an alibi for cruelty, a cover for selfishness, and even a moral trap. Would you not lie to protect your child?

Moreover, those who feel they possess ‘The Truth’ are empowered by their conviction yet they are also inevitably blinded by it. They may thus assign ‘the other’ status to those who have doubts – even if doing so marginalizes inquiry and curiosity, which are, ironically, the tools of truth finding. An airtight position leaves no room for breathing.

“The Other Story” emerged from a desire to interrogate these matters using the language of cinema, which has the advantage of offering note merely and argument, but also, chiefly, a resonant experience.

“The Other Story” is situated in the city of Jerusalem, which literally translates to ‘city of peace’ but for which peace has been eternally elusive. Jerusalem is also known as ‘city of truth, yet competing truths have been wrestling for hegemony and peaceful coexistence inside its walls forever with murky results. This effortlessly cinematic city therefore serves as apt backdrop for an exploration of the themes of identity and truth.

As subverting one sided truisms was one of the film’s objectives, it seemed appropriate to tell the story through the quests of two young women, thus subverting the common tendency, in history and cinema, to place male agency at the center of the narrative.

On one side is Anat Abadi, an intense young woman who has recently found God, to the horror of her secular tribe. On the other is Sari alter, a married mother who, having escaped her cloistered religious upbringing for the promise of secular freedom, is chafing under the constraints of her humdrum marriage, feeling she had traded one cage for another.

Both women must confront the tension between self-assertion and tribal affiliation as they negotiate dueling fundamental human desires: to be, and to belong. Along their intersecting journeys they and the characters in their orbit traverse uneasily the landscape of competing faiths, ambitions, and viewpoints. By the end, it is the power of the human encounter that will change profoundly the way each of them regards both truth and ‘the other’.

AVI NESHER WRITER-DIRECTOR

Avi Neshet’s acclaimed films have played a major part in Israeli cinema’s success and rise to international prominence. His films have netted multiple Israeli Academy Award wins and over two dozen nominations. Each of his most recent four features – *The Secrets*, *The Matchmaker*, *The Wonders* and *Past Life* – had its world premiere at the prestigious Toronto International Film Festival and was greeted with critical acclaim.

Neshet’s earlier films include *Turn Left at the End of the World*, which was nominated for seven Israeli Academy awards and was the biggest Israeli box office of the decade; The controversial *The Troupe* has become a cult classic and was recently voted by The Israeli Film Critics Association as one of the Ten Best Israeli Feature Films of all time. *Rage & Glory*, another politically-charged film, was selected by the Lincoln Center Film Society as one of the most important films in Israeli cinema history. After seeing *Rage and Glory*, legendary producer Dino De Laurentis (*Blue Velvet*) convinced Neshet to come to Hollywood, where Neshet wrote and directed *Timebomb* for MGM and *Doppelganger* for 20th Century Fox. Both films won prizes at the Avoriaz Science Fiction and Fantasy Festival in France. Neshet also wrote, produced and directed the independent feature *The Taxman* which opened to extraordinary reviews.

Nesher has received the Cinematic Excellence Award at the Haifa Film Festival, the Outstanding Achievement Award at the Jerusalem Film Festival and a star on the Avenue of the Stars – an honor rarely bestowed upon directors.

The Other Story stars Tribeca Film Festival Best Actress Award winner Joy Rieger and European Best Actor Award winner Sasson Gabai. Nesher wrote the screenplay for *The Other Story* with world renowned psychologist and novelist Dr. Noam Shpancer (“The Good Psychologist”). It is based on a true story.

DR. NOAM SHPANCER CO-SCREENWRITER

A Professor of Psychology at Otterbein University in Westerville, Ohio and a licensed, practicing clinic psychologist, Dr. Shpancer is the author of three Hebrew novels, most recently: *The Measure of Mercy* (2011). His second novel, *The Good Psychologist* (2009) has found broad international success and has been translated into six languages.

He is also an award-winning newspaper columnist for Ha’aretz, the Guardian, the New Yorker, The New York Times, Huffington Post, Vice, and Quillette, and an official blogger for the magazine Psychology Today. His blog, titled Insight Therapy, focuses on the accessible presentation of psychological scholarship and insight. It has over 6,000,000 unique hits to date.

The VOLATILE CONFLICT BETWEEN SECULAR AND RELIGIOUS JUDAISM by Dr. Noam Shpancer

The Other Story co-Screenwriter

Like it or not, the word “Israel” today connotes conflict and war. In the News, Israel is mentioned most often in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, just as crucial to Israel’s future and character, if less well known, is Israel’s war with itself – the volatile internal conflict between secular and religious Judaism. Currently, the secular ethos and institutions of Israel’s early history are being challenged by the fervent forces of religious Judaism, which have taken over large swaths of Israeli population, politics, culture and real estate. Will theocracy replace democracy? Will biblical law become the law of the land?

This conflict is embodied well in the phenomenon of **‘hazara betshuva’** (returning to the faith), where young secular Jews become religiously devout. Starting in the late 60s, several forces have combined to give rise to the trend. First, Israel has by that time become a powerful and relatively prosperous nation, thus freeing its young people to contemplate questions of meaning rather than mere survival. Moreover, Israel’s shockingly swift and decisive victory in the Six Days War of 1967 was seen by many as a miracle, a work of providence, thus pushing to the surface previously dormant religious passions in the populace. By that time too, the religious community in Israel has grown in size and political influence, and religious institutions became actively involved in organized efforts to bring secular Israelis closer to the faith.

Since those early days, **‘hazara betshuva’** has become a familiar, albeit emotionally charged, feature of Israeli life and culture.

Hazara Betshuva is a complex phenomenon. The (mostly) young people who decide to leave their secular lives behind and take on the severe practices and values of Orthodox Judaism do

not share a similar psychological profile. Their stories are diverse and their reasons multiple. Some fall under the spell of a charismatic rabbi or romantic partner. Some are attracted to the intellectual heft of Torah study, with its interminable multilayered debate. Others seek a meaningful alternative to a secular world they experience as chaotic, shallow, morally corrupt, or frightening. Some may find refuge from internal turmoil, from trauma, or from their own destructive impulses in the strict behavioral discipline and tight communal rules that comprise an Orthodox religious life. Some may crave the certainty, order, and stability provided by ancient wisdom and tribal rituals. Their paths to faith may also differ. Some change gradually over time, perhaps years, in a process known as **'hitchazkut'** (becoming stronger), while for others the shift is abrupt, completed over several weeks or months.

Whatever their motives, one thing those who cross over from secularism to Orthodox Judaism have in common is the effect on their families of origin, which is almost always experienced as a crisis. When the son or daughter of a secular family becomes religiously devout, family bonds are invariably tested and family boundaries must be re-drawn.

Expectations for the future alter, as do routine interactions such as during meals, weekends, visits, and holidays. The family contract must be renegotiated: What can be worn, or purchased, or cooked, or eaten, or watched, or spoken; who can be touched, or looked at, or invited over, or loved – all these considerations and habits will change.

The secular parents often find that their parental love, their wish for their child to find happiness, and their secular values of tolerance and individual freedom conflict harshly with their shock over the child's renouncement of parental values and worldview. Parents may also be plagued by a sense of failure, blaming themselves for their child's disenchantment with the secular life they have modeled and championed. A fear of losing contact with the child altogether is also common. To keep in contact, parents often restructure cherished old ways and habits to accommodate the myriad restrictions that accompany the Orthodox lifestyle. The situation is complicated further by the fact that the Orthodox political parties possess outsize power in Israel's electoral system, and use it regularly to expand their control and influence over the culture at large. Thus, a child who becomes Orthodox de facto joins a political agenda that the secular parents may consider oppressive and hostile.

The newly devout son or daughter also faces multiple challenges, including reconciling their love for their parents with their new view of them as fundamentally misguided, and absorbing the parents' anger and hurt. They also must establish a whole new identity – new routines, new language, new rules, new friends, new wardrobe – as well as face the persistent prejudice within the Orthodox community against newcomers to the faith.

In some families, the change may result in continuous arguments and futile persuasion efforts. Bitterness and disappointment may lead to a complete breakdown and the severing of relations between the parents and the child. Other times, family members figure out ways to accommodate each other, maintain contact, and find peace, mutual respect and a modicum of acceptance. Nothing, however, will again be as it was before.

CAST BIOS

Joy Rieger – Anat Abadi

At the young age of 23, Rieger is already one of Israel's biggest and most wanted actresses. She won the Israeli Television Academy Award for Best Actress and The Israeli Theater Awards as Best Actress in the same year. In 2017 Rieger was nominated for an Ophir Award as Best Actress for Leading Role in Avi Nesher's *Past Life*. Joy Rieger picked up the award for best actress at Tribeca Film Festival 2018.

Maya Dagan – Tali Abadi

Winner of an Ophir Award for her dramatic role in Avi Nesher's 2014 acclaimed film *The Matchmaker*. Dagan also received the Most Promising Actress Award for her role in *Letters to Noa* and the Best Actress Award for her remarkable performance as Fanny Brice in Israel's National Theater's *A Funny Girl*.

Yuval Segal – Dr. Yonatan Abadi

One of Israel's biggest stars. Performed a leading role in many TV shows, including *Fauda*, *The A Word*, and *Polishuk* and in Israel's National Theater. He was nominated for an Ophir Award for a leading role in Dover Koshashvili's *Present from Above*.

Sasson Gabai – Dr. Shlomo Abadi

Winner of an Ophir Award, Asia Pacific Screen Award (nominated), European Film Awards and Jerusalem Film Festival in 2007 as Best Actor for leading role in the film *The Band's Visit*. Gabai joined the Broadway version (winners of 10 Tony Awards 2018) reprising his role from the film. Through the years, Gabai played in various Israeli and international films. He received another Ophir Award for *Time for Cherries*. Gabai also played in various productions in the Israeli television and National Theater.

Nathan Goshen – Shahar Elkayam

Singer-songwriter Nathan Goshen's meteoric rise to the center stage of Israeli music has been the greatest success story in recent years. His songs *Everything I Have*, *Where Are You*, *The Borders of Reason*, all hit the top of all local radio charts, earning him the title of "Breakthrough Act" from Galgalatz and winning his album Gold Album status. His 2017 hit *Thinking About It (Let It Go)* got him a Platinum Record status in the Netherlands and a Gold Record status in Norway, Sweden, and Denmark, where he was also signed by the major record label Sony Records.

Maayan Bloom – Rami Alter

Maayan Bloom is an Israeli actor and writer born and raised in Tel Aviv. He studied at the Nissan Nativ school for acting and has worked in theater, Television and film both as an actor and a writer. His works include the original sketch show 'The Saddest Sketch Show in the World' (channel 10) 'The Plague' (HOT), 'Lost in Africa' (YES), 'Comeback' (HOT), 'Foreign Player' (channel 12) 'The Office' (YES), 'Greenhouse Academy' (Netflix) and many more.

Avigail Harari – Sari Alter

Winner of Best Supporting Actress at "les parents terrible" by Jan Kukto, Beer Sheva Theatre. Harari also has a remarkable performance as Desdemona in *Othello* by Shakespeare, Cameri Theatre. She is also known for many roles on television and in cinema as well.

Orna Fitousi – Pagan High Priestess

Winner of Golden Actress Award – FIFA Biarritz Festival. Born in 1968. Graduated Nissan Nativ's Acting Studio, Jerusalem. Winner of two scholarships for the America-Israel Cultural foundation. Performed a leading role in many TV shows and films between them, *Temptation* by Eran Riklis and *Hello Goodbye* an Israeli-French co-production with Gerard Depardieu and Fanny Erdan.

MAIN CAST

Dr. Shlomo Abadi	Sasson Gabai
Anat Abadi	Joy Rieger
Dr. Yonatan Abadi	Yuval Segal
Tali Abadi	Maya Degan
Shahar Elkayam	Nathan Goshen
Sari Alter	Avigail Harari
Rami Alter	Maayan Bloom
Pagan High Priestess	Orna Fitousi

MAIN CREW

Directed by Avi Neshet

Produced by David Silber, Avi Neshet, Moshe and Leon Edery, David M. Milch

Story and script Avi Neshet and Noam Shpancer

Cinematography Michel Abramowicz

Editing Isaac Sheayek

Original Music Cyrille Aufort

Songs Nathan Goshen

Art Director Ido Dolev

Production Metro Communications, Artomas Communications, United King, Mila Media