

‘Accused’

International thriller opens Feb. 19 at Orinda Theatre

By Sophie Braccini



Photo provided

This month's International Film Showcase selection, "Accused," is a well-done criminal mystery, harsh, thrilling, nerve racking—a tough film, based on a true story. It denounces the abuse and collusion between justice and economic interest, the complacency of some magistrates and the difficulties to bring truth forth once verdicts have been rendered. The film from the Netherlands is a must-see for all those interested in the courts and in justice.

Lucia De Berk's story began in the Netherlands in 2001. She was a nurse in a hospital where a baby in her care died. First toxicology reports showed poison in the baby's blood that caused his death. De Berk was accused of murder. A somewhat arrogant loner, she attracted suspicion. The prosecution scrutinized her past and started collecting data on deaths that had happened while she was working. Statistical and circumstantial evidence was enough to convict

her of seven murders and four attempted murders. She was sentenced to life in prison. Only a few people believed in her and tried to fight the judicial system for years to free her. This case is said to have been the most blatant miscarriage of justice in modern Netherlands.

Kudos go to director Paula Van der Oest. There is no lag time as the scenario is effectively set and the audience quickly senses the inescapable trap De Berk is going to fall into, and how she becomes prisoner of a terrible grinding machine with no rewind button. In this role Ariane Schuller, who plays De Berk, found a way to express human despair with class. The rest of the cast also offer solid and touching performances. All of them look real—normal people from everyday life thrown into a turmoil that threatens to crush them all.

A part of the movie takes place in Netherlands' prisons, which is not a pretty sight. The scenario does not

dwell on some of the worst things that happened to De Berk, such as the stroke she suffered after one of her judicial setbacks or her detention in an asylum. There are other ways the movie is not true to the facts; the eager young prosecutor who builds the case against her is an invention. The film only barely touches on the hysteria that developed in the press and the public against De Berk, who was called "The Angel of Death." The role of public opinion in a case with such media coverage could have been explored when it worked against the nurse, and then later, for her.

"Accused" is opening Feb. 19 for a one-week United States commercial premiere engagement at the Orinda Theatre. It was shortlisted for an Oscar in the Best Foreign Film category. This is the second time that a film directed by Van Der Oest has represented its country at the Academy Awards. For information, visit www.lamorindatheatre.com.

International Film Festival at Pleasant Hill March 5-13

Submitted by Riva Gambert

The East Bay International Jewish Film Festival kicks off its 21st season on Saturday, March 5 at the Century 16 Theatres in Pleasant Hill with the Best Foreign Film Oscar nominee "Labyrinth of Lies." It will conclude with another Oscar submission in the foreign language category, "Baba Joon," on March 13.

"We're delighted that our 21st year will bring many award-winning films to our community that speak to a broad audience," says chair Margaret Winter, a Contra Costa resident originally from London. "And while many of our films embrace serious issues, festival-goers will also be able to enjoy lighter fare such as the romantic French comedy 'Serial Bad Weddings' and the American romance '5 to 7' co-starring Glenn Close and Frank Langella."

The closing night film "Baba Joon" has received much press because it is Israel's first film in the Iranian language Farsi. It tells a universal story of intergenerational conflict and father and son relations. Veteran actor Navid Negahban, best known in the United States as mastermind Abu Nazir in Showtime's Homeland, stars as Yitzhak, the tough father who demands that his son Moti follow in his footsteps. The international cast is made up of almost all Iranian-born actors.

The Festival includes films from Spain, France, Canada, Germany, Morocco, New Zealand, Poland and Israel. Based on a true incident, the Spanish World War II thriller "Dirty Wolves" follows the heroic exploits of two women who sabotaged a Nazi mining operation. "The Canadian drama, Remember, stars two legendary actors, Christopher Plummer and Martin Landau. It is a must see," adds Margaret. "You will remember this film long after the credits roll."

The entire nine-day schedule can be viewed online at eastbayjewishfilm.org.

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Meyer's service extends beyond the classroom. From 1969 to 1975 he served as a clarinetist in the National Guard's 59th Army Band. For Meyer, joining the National Guard was no small miracle, and was quite possibly a lifesaver. He had been given a 1-A classification by the Selective Service and a week out of college he was preparing to report for service—and a likely tour of Vietnam. Then a friend called with the offer to audition for the Guard.

Shortly after joining the 59th Army Band, Meyer took his first teaching position in Yuba City and so began his double life. "I'd work all day at school, jump in the car, go up to Sacramento. I played for the governor, I played for Reagan's inauguration, I played for big time social events for senators," he said. "It was just a hoot, we really had a good time." It wasn't uncommon for him to get home at 2 a.m.

Meyer devoted the same time and

energy to the CMEA starting in the '80s. He served two terms as a CMEA Bay Section Band Representative and one term as president of the regional Bay Section.

Meyer figures to be surrounded by CMEA colleagues, as well as friends and family, when he's inducted into the CMEA Hall of Fame at the Feb. 12 Awards Gala. No doubt Meyer will want to find somewhere to celebrate afterward, so long as it isn't the Round Up.

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