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Adam Green

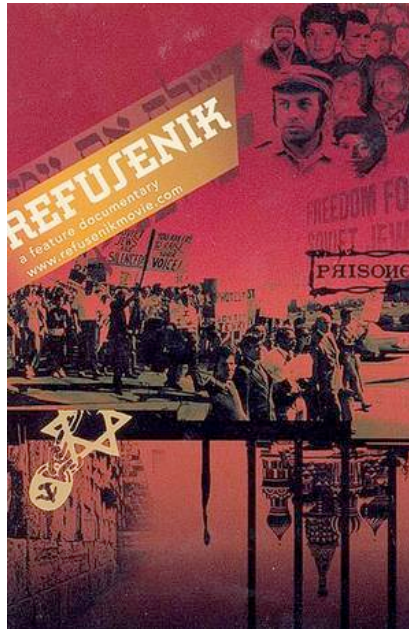
Film

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Tracking Shots
Refusenik: A Heroic Portrait

Brave Soviet Jews get their tribute
by Ella Taylor
May 6th, 2008 12:00 AM

The brave Soviet Jews in Laura Bialis' absorbing portrait of the refusenik movement of the 1960s and '70s had to contend not only with official Soviet repression of religious expression and their own concomitant ignorance of their heritage, but with the virulent anti-Semitism that had flourished in Russia for centuries. In one respect, however, the dissidents lucked out: Their plight resonated powerfully with civil-rights campaigners, campus radicals, and ethnic-pride activists all over the West. Sources from all of these now-graying groups and archival footage tell a straight-ahead but moving story of how a pro-Soviet Jewry movement composed mainly of housewives and students badgered their own governments to put pressure on the Soviets to let their people go—by that time, from the Siberian labor camps, mental hospitals, prisons, and house arrests that were punishment for applying to leave for Israel. For all its euphoric ending, though, *Refusenik* tells a partial story: Successive waves of Soviet émigrés (many of whom went immediately to more prosperous countries instead of Israel) flooded the tiny country with overqualified new citizens who ended up doing the work they'd been demoted to back home—sweeping streets and manning elevators. Today, their leader, Natan Sharansky, is one of Israel's leading hawks on the occupied territories, showing the darker side of the intransigent courage that got him through nine years in a Soviet jail.



Refusenik
Directed by Laura Bialis
Abramorama and the Foundation for Documentary Projects
Opens May 9, Quad Cinema

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The Fall

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Noise

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PERSONAL OF THE DAY



duoo

"It would be great to meet other artists; whether it be painters, filmmakers, musicians, whatever."

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