



Hilarious U.S.-Israeli Comedy Series “Chanshi” Has Fun With Stereotypes

NEWS

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PARK CITY, UTAH – JANUARY 24: Directors, Aaron Geva (L) and Mickey Triest (R) and Creator/Actor, Aleeza Chanowitz (C) attend the 2023 Sundance Film Festival “Chanshi” premiere at Prospector Square Theatre on January 24, 2023 in Park City, Utah. (Photo by Amy Sussman/Getty Images)

By Peter Jones

Chanshi is like other young ultra-Orthodox Jews from Brooklyn. She is engaged to marry a nice Jewish boy of her parents’ liking and is intently interested in exploring Israeli culture.

And she wants to have sex — lots of it — with random Israeli soldiers.

“It’s so cold in here. Can I sleep in your room — on the floor?” she coyly asks a new friend.

Chanshi is a 10-episode wonderfully dark U.S.-Israeli comedy series about a fish out of water — or perhaps a fresh-water fish in salt — gefilte or otherwise. The first four episodes premiered at the 2023 Sundance Film Festival on January 24 followed by a Q&A with the co-directors and lead cast.

“I was scared by what I was doing,” series creator and lead actor Aleeza Chanowitz says, noting that *Chanshi* is her first foray into the world of a full-fledged series. “And then, my mother-in-law said, ‘Just think of it like you’re making a bunch of shorts.’ That made it a lot less scary.”

Chanowitz is delightfully quirky as the socially challenged title character. On the cusp of her ho-hum engagement, Chanshi makes an unannounced pilgrimage to Israel, where she crudely crashes her best friend’s wedding plans, wreaks havoc on Jewish mothers and social morés, and unashamedly pursues her vivid sexual daydreams for men in uniform.

Chanowitz says *Chanshi* is an exaggeration of her own life as an U.S.-Israeli transplant.

“[It’s based on] my own experiences, my friends, things that I think are funny,” she says. “. . . I slept with a lot of soldiers. I moved to Israel when I was 21. . . . I feel like there’s a reason I was kind of running away. . . . I wanted to be Jewish, but I also wanted to be the kind of Jew I wanted to be, and I felt like when I was in Israel I could pick and choose what I wanted. A lot of people feel the opposite of what I feel, and that’s legit.”

In the course of the series, Chanshi walks headfirst into any number of awkward moments of her own making, including her visit across the border to a ragtag Jewish settlement on the West Bank, where she manages to shake up the rural social structure like a city girl dropped into the midst of Appalachia. Through it all, the pressure for everyone to get married is as present at dinner as keeping kosher.

“Can we talk about something besides weddings?” a bored single woman asks at one point.

Henry Winkler is a charmer as Chanshi’s American Jewish father. The casting was a matter of luck and a process of elimination, according to co-director Aaron Gava.

“I made a list of Jewish American men. . . .” he says.

“And then narrowed it down to people who look like they could be my parents,” Chanowitz quickly interjects with a laugh. “. . . who don’t hate Israel.”

“[Winkler] loves Israeli TV,” Gava adds. “He loves the scripts. We were in the right place at the right time.”

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