

## Old Man – There is no such thing as an Old Man

*Ma'ariv December 21, 2008–12–23*

The films that are shown on Channel 2 on Thursday evenings are almost always films that touch on sensitive corners of Israeli society. And Barak Heyman's film *Dancing Alfonso* is an excellent example of this. Heyman follows a group of elderly people who participate in a flamenco dance class. One of the participants is Alfonso Malul, a 73 year old man who is mourning his late wife – but refuses to give up his right to live, to dance and to fall in love anew.

Heyman's camera embraces Alfonso; as he dances elegantly, as he flirts enthusiastically, as he glides gracefully from Spanish to French to Arabic – to poetic Hebrew. He is not just a guy in a dance class. He is a man who has the whole world at his feet and he takes on the world without shame. The film's message is that there is no such thing as an old person – and without too much noise and fanfare – I got the message.

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## The Last Dance

*Yaron Fried, Haaretz, December 19<sup>th</sup>, 2008*

Love of your fellow man. Who would believe that in this age of cynicism one can still enjoy this anachronistic concept. It is possible and tears may even flow. This love of your fellow man just pours out of every frame of this gentle and exact documentary. The director, Barak Heyman, loves his characters – who are elderly participants in a flamenco dance class. These characters are real heroes who love one another even in the tense moments before a performance where everything seems to be falling apart and one of the participants even comments that they are "worse than children". Love of life is another main player in this film; not only when they are dressed in their colorful dance clothes and large gestures – but the characters take on life to the fullest. The young dance instructor asks that the dancers find the animal inside them. She tells them that they are "black panthers in the jungle" – and you can see the transformation before your eyes.

Heyman sensitively skips over the question of tomorrow. For these characters, only the here and now are what matter. Each dance might be the last, but no one dare say so. They simply dance and go on. "There is no end to desire" says one of the women – agitated by Heyman's question about love at their age. Even Alfonso Malul, who has just lost his beloved wife, does not delay his quest for love. The will to live, the appetite for love give rise to amazement and inspiration in Heyman's sensitive hands. The people in the film do not live in a movie-world. They live life, and yet they are true stars. When Alfonso describes one of the women he is courting, and says "I know her whole life, everything that has happened to her" – we feel the same way about the characters in the film. The film , which is being shown as

part of Channel 2's Thursday line-up, is yet another example of the success of programming quality films at a challenging time-slot. This film, like others in this series, makes you want an encore – or at least the next dance.

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### **Romantic Dance**

*Pnai Plus , December 18, 2008*

One of the special things about documentary film is that you never know what to expect. When Barak Heyman started to follow the rehearsals of flamenco dance group for retired folk, he must have known that something interesting would happen. The connection between old age and the flamenco is obvious to anyone who has really seen the dance. Old age and wrinkles only add to the depth. Knowing that a group of elderly people are fulfilling a dream was good for experienced filmmakers like the Heyman brothers. Fantasy is a topic that films well - and fantasy with flowers in your hair and long flowing skirts is even better.

But Heyman got more than he bargained for. He got caught up in a drama. The most colorful male character turns out to be Algerian born Alfonso Malul – who loses his wife during the filming, but returns to dance and is determined to find new love. Alfonso is in love with love and will do anything for it. He risks all. He fantasize and is disappointed, he plans and takes risks. This is a warm film – sweet and romantic, that shows us that the need for love can make us all into teenagers. And that real growing up might be over-rated.

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### **Dancing with Women**

*Rating, December 18, 2008*

*The search for love is never ending – just ask Alfonso who is a flamenco dancer*

Alfonso is a 75 year old man who, after the death of his wife, embarks on a journey for a new partner. Together with the other members of the dance troupe we are shown a fresh and little known perspective of older people and the never ending search for love. Barak Heyman's film has been shown in festivals all over the world, including the Shanghai International Film Festival where it won the Silver Prize.

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**Jury's statement**

A charmingly intimate insight into the love and passion of old age, using the flamenco to "symbolize the determination to remain fully alive later in life"

Jury Statement for the Asian Silver Award, Shanghai International Film Festival, China, 2008

Dancing Alfonso casts new light on the twilight years, which we learn aren't always as troubled as they're cracked up to be. Through the eyes of Alfonso and his dancing friends, life is still seen as exciting, new, passionate (yes, in "that" way) and at times, a bit like the fickle teenage years. It's a great testament to Heymann's skill that he takes us so far into the intimate lives of these endearing people without ever making us wish he'd never done so. Wonder how? Maybe Heymann listened to that smart dance teacher. As she sternly counsels "Our heart must be open, always. Even if we have been hurt many times in our life we have to keep our heart open!" Manana might come after all, and at the film's conclusion, we're sure it's coming for that dancing Alfonso. Good for him!"

Roseana Auten, SXSW Int'l Festival, March, 2008

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"In suburban Tel Aviv, Israeli filmmaker Barak Heymann has un-earthed quiet gem of movie: Dancing Alfonso. While observing the activities of a group of flamenco-dancing seniors, Heymann finds a compelling central character – the charismatic, charming Alfonso. He is a sweet naïf, seemingly unbothered by a senior's usual vexations of body and soul – a true product of the manana culture of which he is born. "Are there still people like you?" asks one of his smitten classmates, gazing into his eyes. Although he does not know it yet, Alfonso's life is about to change drastically. Is he ready? As the wise-beyond-her-years flamenco dance teacher warns, manana may not be an option. "Be yourselves, all the way, as if there is no tomorrow!"

She commands the group, all of whom are 40 years or so her senior.