

## Cinema Minima: **Rupert Murdoch's drive to kill off the movie rental business**

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### [WHEN DO WE EAT? by Salvador Litvak NY debut a smash](#)



The talk of the town in Pleasantville, New York is [WHEN DO WE EAT?](#), a new comedy about a [Passover->@dictionary] [seder->@dictionary] gone awry that no one should ‘pass over’. The audience was in stitches at a recent, sold-out screening of [Salvador Litvak](#)’s debut feature at the Jacob Burns Center in the New York City suburb. A Q-and-A with Litvak, hosted by [New York Times critic Janet Maslin](#) ran overtime, with complimentary remarks from Maslin and the audience.

The “world’s fastest Passover seder” goes horribly awry after one of the sons in the Stuckman family slips his dad a dose of [LSD->@wikipedia]. By the end of the night, however, the visions of Mr. Stuckman, played [Michael Lerner](#), turn him into a modern-day Moses, intent on leading his hungry family into the Promised Land of family forgiveness. But — of course — they’re all so stubborn, it would be easier to part the Red Sea.

[Lesley Ann Warren](#), [Jack Klugman](#), [Cynda Williams](#), [Shiri Appleby](#), [Mili Avital](#), [Adam Lamberg](#), and [Ben Feldman](#) are among [WHEN DO WE EAT?](#)’s brilliant ensemble.

The film was shot in 30 days in California. The set’s ornate [marquee->@dictionary], which plays a central part, was designed by [Emmy](#)-winner [Bernt Capra](#). Its design was based on illustrations by artist [Artur Szyk](#) found in a Passover [Haggadah->@dictionary] which director Litvak had as a child. The film is a collaborative effort between Litvak and his wife Nina, who co-wrote the script. “This was the absolute best experience any screenwriter could hope for, says” Mrs. Litvak. “Usually writers are completely cut out of the process, but I was sleeping with the director/producer so I like to think I actually had some creative involvement,” she laughs.

Rejoins Litvak, “Of course, after a while I couldn’t listen to any more of the line readings my co-writer wanted me to force on the actors, and I had to ban her from the set...and that lasted for a good two days.”

Although the film is about Jews and one of their key holidays, it definitely has mass appeal. “Non-Jews see their own families in the Stuckmans just as Jews see themselves in movies about Italian or Greek families.

And hey, the last supper was a seder”.

“Our movie is unique for one simple reason: it embraces spirituality. We don’t shy away from it: if a family as dysfunctional as the Stuckmans can heal some of its grudges by touching a higher reality, then anyone can”.

Indeed, the Litvaks put that universality theory to the test by sending the film to the [deadCENTER Film Festival in Oklahoma City](#), and they came away with Best Feature. “It’s a tricky thing when you’re talking about a group that is both a culture and a religion because nothing is more divisive these days than faith, yet our audiences have told us how pleasantly surprised they are to find a depiction of religion that is funny and intelligent instead of reactionary and obvious.”

Litvak, who holds both law and film school degrees, has been living in Los Angeles for a few years now. He’s excited to be back in New York for the screening. “It feels great, especially being so close to where I grew up in New City.”

It was his first time at the Burns Center, a state-of-the art film center dedicated to presenting the best of independent, documentary, and world cinema. One of the center’s main goals is to promote greater appreciation of film among the community’s youth.

Litvak remembers his first encounters with the world of film soon after his family emigrated to the U. S. from Chile. “My love for film most likely sprang from the Sundays I spent with my dad seeing westerns in the old strip of theaters on 42nd Street.”

In addition to last night’s screening and the showing in Oklahoma City, the film was also the Opening Night Film at the 2005 Palm Beach International Film Festival where it was a smash hit.

It had the same slot and received the same response that [MY BIG FAT GREEK WEDDING](#) had a few years ago. Indeed, Maslin said [WHEN DO WE EAT?](#) has all the elements to recreate that film’s success, and the crowd roared its approval.

“We are very optimistic about the power of this film to bring people together,” says Nina Davidovich Litvak, “because we’ve already heard stories about people leaving the theater and calling relatives they wouldn’t speak to for years.”

But at the end of the day, the Litvaks are fast to point out that their film is really just a comedy, designed to make people laugh.

No word yet on the actual release. One option of course is Passover 2006. But don’t be surprised if it hits the big screens during Christmas. “Everyone loves a big-hearted drug-your-dad-at-a-holiday-dinner” movie at the end of the year, jokes Litvak.

