



Monday 24 September at 6:30 pm

Seconds

USA 1966

Director: John Frankenheimer
Producer: Edward Lewis
Production co: Joel Productions, John Frankenheimer Film, Gibraltar Productions
Screenplay: Lewis John Carlino. Based on the novel by David Ely
Photography: James Wong Howe
Editors: David Newhouse, Ferris Webster
Music: Jerry Goldsmith

With: Rock Hudson (Antiochus Wilson), Salome Jens (Nora Marcus), John Randolph (Arthur Hamilton), Will Geer (old man), Jeff Corey (Mr Ruby), Richard Anderson (Dr Innes), Murray Hamilton (Charlie), Karl Swenson (Dr Morris), Khigh Dhiagh (Davallo), Frances Reid (Emily Hamilton), Wesley Addy (John), John Lawrence (Texan), Elisabeth Fraser (plump blonde), Dody Heath (Sue Bushman), Robert Brubaker (Mayberry), Dorothy Morris (Mrs Filter), Barbara Werle (secretary)

106 mins, Blu-ray, B&W. M nudity

Almost half a century after its premiere, *Seconds* remains unique – a probing psychological adventure, a merciless assault on social evils, and one of the most startling, spellbinding rides you'll ever take. – David Sterritt, *Criterion Collection*

For at least 20 years I've remembered John Frankenheimer's *Seconds* (1966) with a feeling of clammy dread unique to that film, and recommended it to countless friends without ever quite working up the nerve to rewatch it myself. Sometimes the person I'm recommending it to will already know the movie, and they'll get a wild look in their eyes for a moment and say "Oh my God, *Seconds*!" Though its reputation has grown steadily since it bombed at the box office upon release, *Seconds* is one of those movies that has somehow held on to permanent cult status, a talisman passed between passionate enthusiasts, difficult for years to find at all... Now that Criterion has come out with a Blu-Ray edition of *Seconds* loaded with extras, I thought I'd take the opportunity to revisit this utterly sui generis, categorisation-defying film, a horror-tinged thriller (or is it a sci-fi-inflected political parable?) about aging, alienation, and the American belief in starting over...

The early-blooming enfant terrible Frankenheimer, best known for politically astute, wickedly manipulative thrillers like *The Manchurian Candidate* and *Seven Days in May*, is working at the top of his craft in *Seconds*, which critics now sometimes group with those two less intimately scaled thrillers in a so-called "paranoia trilogy." Though it's not concerned with global politics and warfare, *Seconds* is a blistering assessment of the cultural politics of the mid-1960s, equally bleak in its view of the establishment and the counterculture. The existential freedom supposedly afforded by Arthur's reinvention as Tony proves to be little more than hollow solipsism – but was there really anything more substantial about his abandoned marriage, which Arthur's widow describes in a devastating late scene as "a polite, celibate truce"?

Seconds was Frankenheimer's last black-and-white film, and the first one he made with the legendary cinematographer James Wong Howe. Every shot provides fresh evidence of Howe's artistry and intuitiveness as a collaborator: He uses expressionistic high-key lighting, deep focus and innovative camera placements (at times mounting a camera to an actor's back) to create a mood of ineffable cosmic dread that hangs over the movie like a miasma. (The brilliant Saul Bass opening-title sequence, in which human facial features are distorted by trick mirrors to the sound of Jerry Goldsmith's piercing organ chords, perfectly sets the eerie mood.) And the ending, holy smokes, the ending... Go watch the movie – or rewatch it, if it's been 20 years – and the next time we meet we can have a short but evocative conversation. – Dana Stevens, *Slate.com*



Monday 01 October at 6:30 pm

Fill the Void

Lemale et ha'halal
Israel 2012

Director/Screenplay: Rama Burshtein
Producer: Assaf Amir
Production co: Norma Productions
Photography: Asaf Sudry
Editor: Sharon Elovic
Music: Yitzhak Azulay

With: Hadas Yaron (Shira), Yiftach Klein (Yochay), Irit Sheleg (Rivka), Chaim Sharir (Aharon), Razia Israeli (Aunt Hanna), Hila Feldman (Frieda), Renana Raz (Esther), Yael Tal (Shifi), Michael David Weigl (Shtreicher), Ido Samuel (Yossi), Neta Moran (Bilha)

90 mins, Blu-ray. M
In Hebrew with English subtitles

A perfectly pitched performance from Hadas Yaron and ethereal close-quarters cinematography by Asaf Sudry elevate this warm and sympathetic portrait of a young woman's struggle to balance personal fulfilment with family duty into the realms of something very special. Set within the Orthodox Hasidic community of Tel Aviv, and offering an intimate insider's view of a world which remains little seen in mainstream cinema, *Fill the Void* is an intelligent and moving examination of the possibilities of personal freedom within the strict confines of religion and tradition....

Written and directed by Rama Burshtein, whose previous work is described as comprising "films for the orthodox community, some of them for women only", *Fill the Void* gives vibrant voice to characters who often seem to exist within a great silence. Like the protagonists of the Jane Austen novels which Burshtein cites as a primary influence, these women live within a society in which their options are limited by rigidly enforced rules, and yet it's their choices, emotions, conflicts and resolutions which drive and define the narrative. It is the maternal Rivka (Irit Sheleg) whose grief at the loss of a daughter provides the impetus for Shira's dilemma, and who initially conceives the plan which may offer both liberation and/or imprisonment for her family... For Burshtein, the sphere of Shira's experience is absolute; this is not a story in which retreat... from the strictures of her society is an option, any more than it would be for Austen's Emma Woodhouse. Indeed, the omnipresent Hasidic ritual seems to set this story somewhat back in time, away from the modern world, closer to the conventions of the past than the myriad opportunities of the present.

Some audiences may find this worldview alienating; the acceptance of an existence in which all the promises and possibilities of life are bound by the prospect of inevitable marriage brings with it many problems, both personal and political. Yet Burshtein uses the limitations of her story to her advantage, focusing on Shira's unexpected independence, stressing the value of female voices within the community, reiterating the role of choice, even within arranged unions. As for Hadas Yaron, she does a brilliant job of making Shira a fully rounded character, her face a rippling seascape of reactions and responses, at once finely nuanced yet utterly naturalistic. On the evidence of this performance... Yaron is a star in the making – a talented, understated screen presence who draws and holds the camera's attention with ease and grace.

The myriad contradictions of *Fill the Void* are all captured in Yaron's expression in the final shots of the film, which offer a far more ambiguous and open-ended conclusion to this tightly controlled tale than some may care to imagine. Whatever the trajectory of the narrative, Yaron, Burshtein and Asaf Sudry have conspired to leave us with a parting glance as enigmatic and contradictory as the closing back-of-the-bus tableau from *The Graduate*. It's a fine and complex finale to a deceptively enriching film. – Mark Kermode, *The Guardian*