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Late Shift (12a)

Dir: **Petra Volpe**

with: **Leonie Benesch, Sonja Riesen, Alireza Bayram**

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Synopsis: Switzerland, present day. Floria Lind arrives for her nighttime shift in the surgical department of the hospital where she works as a nurse. She learns that the ward won't be fully staffed but she is undeterred. As the shift goes on, the lack of staff and high volume of patients ramp up her workload. She finds herself being forced to make rapid decisions, one of which has serious implications for patient safety. By the end of the shift, Floria has been pushed to breaking point.

Floria (Leonie Benesch) is exactly the kind of person you'd hope to see appearing at your bedside during a hospital stay. A dedicated and efficient nurse, Floria approaches those in her care with patience and empathy, providing a calming reassurance to the lonely and fearful. She remembers to bring lollipops for children visiting their mother, and she takes the time to sit and look at dog photographs with an elderly man who has no visitors, even if we can see in her face that her mind is buzzing with the countless other things she needs to be doing right now. In every respect, Floria is a model healthcare professional.

By the end of Petra Volpe's *Late Shift*, Floria's ability to operate with grace under pressure has been tested to the limit. The film follows this nurse over a single evening, beginning with small talk among colleagues and a pair of box-fresh white trainers, which will look much less fresh by the end of the night. Almost as soon as Floria begins her rounds, things start to go awry. The hospital that Floria works in is severely understaffed, which adds to her already significant workload, and she must take a young intern under her wing in her colleague's absence.

Judith Kaufmann's camera glides after Floria as she makes her way down the hospital's corridors and into the patients' rooms, but she can barely get from one person to the next before being pulled off course. A fellow nurse requires help changing an old woman's soiled garments; an increasingly frustrated family demands updates on their mother's condition; patients need transporting to and from the operating theatre; the daughter of a recently discharged patient calls asking if anyone has found her mother's spectacles. *Late Shift* is a drama of gradual accumulation, as a series of seemingly small and mundane issues pile up around Floria until she doesn't know which way to turn, and the sense of screws tightening is accentuated by Emilie Levienaise-Farrouch's metronomic score.

Late Shift was released in Switzerland under the title *Heldin*, which translates as 'heroine', which indicates the point Volpe is making, even before she closes her film with stark statistics about the country's chronic shortage of nurses. It's a tribute to the people who work tirelessly to look after the sick in a dysfunctional system, and a warning that such a situation is unsustainable. The more you demand of nurses, the more you push them to the limit, the more likely it is that mistakes will eventually creep into their work, which inevitably happens to Floria here.

In İlker Çatak's *The Teachers' Lounge* (2023), Benesch showed how adept she was at playing a character trying to maintain a sense of equilibrium while frequently on the back foot, and she brings a similar combination of authority and anxiety to her performance as Floria. Benesch has large, expressive eyes, which she uses to communicate the conflicting emotions that Floria is working so hard to keep in check, particularly in the film's final third, when her more pallid complexion makes those eyes even more arresting. With scant time given to characterisation, Volpe relies heavily on Benesch to carry *Late Shift* and pull the audience into Floria's experience, which she does with conviction and unflashy skill. *Heldin* is the word.

Volpe's writing can be strained and obvious, as in the portrait of a belligerent businessman, who – despite a late attempt to humanise him – feels crudely written as a one-note bastard. A situation involving his expensive watch is the film's broadest and least convincing turn, and it feels unnecessary when what really resonates are the smaller and more intimate moments of humanity that Volpe captures: the way Floria sings a lullaby to soothe a confused old woman; the elegant scarf that she places around a recently deceased patient's neck; a casual conversation between Floria and a cancer-stricken woman who knows the end is coming. The film's compression of such a range of emotional states into a tightly edited 92 minutes can feel nerve-wracking and suffocating, and we share the feeling of catharsis when Floria steps outside the hospital towards the end of the film and finally lets her pent-up emotions spill forth, but she allows herself to cry for less than a minute before she regains composure, wipes her eyes and walks back inside. It's a brief scene that sums up the whole film. There's no time for tears; she has work to do.

Credits

Floria	Leonie Benesch
Bea Schmid	Sonja Riesen
Amelie Afshar	Selma Aldin
Jan Sharif	Alireza Bayram
Nabil Bilgin	Ali Kandaş
Evelyn Bühler	Aline Beetschen
Claudia Bach	Jasmin Mattei
Mr. Leu	Urs Bihler
Mrs. Kuhn	Margherita Schoch
Dr. Strobel	Nicole Bachmann
Director	Petra Volpe
Screenplay	Petra Volpe
Cinematography	Judith Kaufmann
Editing	Hansjorg Weißbrich
Music	Emilie Levienaise-Farrouch
	Switzerland/Germany 2024.
	92 mins

Take 2

Late Shift is a finely-strung hospital drama from Switzerland starring the phenomenal German actor Leonie Benesch which will twang on the nerves of any past, present or future patient, and the hearts of those who owe a debt of gratitude to a nurse. Which is to say, all of us. Occasionally schematic, albeit only in the service of pricking our consciences, Petra Volpe's tense drama is a shot in the arm of undiluted empathy for the over-stretched, under-valued nursing profession.

Volpe (*The Divine Order*, *Dreamland*) is certainly not the first to open the doors to the ER, but this is an almost electrically-sensitive venture into territory normally dominated by TV drama or the masculine energy of films such as *Bringing Out The Dead*. The risks are everyday, but cumulative, as one nurse starts her afternoon/evening stint at a Swiss hospital with a staff member down and a trainee to look after. It is, of course, life and death, and what can ever be more dramatic than that, even if the lives are small and the deaths are quiet? Led by admiration for Benesch in two recent Oscar-nominated films *The Teachers' Lounge* and *September 5*, *Late Shift* will almost certainly attract attention and recognition for her performance.

The elephant in the nurses' room is the gleaming state of the Swiss hospital system, under groaning pressure here but still a digitally-led world away from health systems in third world countries (or even the UK's crumbling NHS). Pressure is still pressure, though, and human dramas, small and large, play out in much the same way on any hospital ward. Although the thrust of the film is dramatic, its underlying drive is humane and its appeal is global.

Drenched in sterile lights and hospital blues, *Late Shift* starts off with a shot of a laundry line of cleanly-pressed uniforms, setting its stall as a slice of drama which is continuous as Nurse Floria arrives in the staff changing room. There's mention of a day off with a small child, and a new pair of trainers are unboxed, but that's the last minute of calm for this competent, anxious health worker. Before she even gets to her station, she has been derailed by an incontinent elderly woman. We can see Floria is patient, able and compassionate, but also under rising levels of stress due to all of those characteristics. She takes her job seriously and if anything, is over-conscientious.

A belter of a score by Emilie Levienaise-Farrouch – not to mention the heart-rending end-credits 'Hope There's Someone' by Ahnoni – is punctuated by the never-ending beep of machines and the rip of velcro as the day-shift winds down and the pressure on Floria ramps up. There's plenty about *Late Shift* that will be very familiar to adepts of hospital dramas: the allergy klaxon; the mislabelled medication; the ominous key to a lethal medicine cupboard that is rather freely swapped around. The businessman dying of pancreatic cancer in the luxe private patient room is an entitled asshole. And the student nurse is a liability, along with the alcoholic lady who insists on smoking with her oxygen canister attached.

Those aren't the elements that distinguish *Late Shift*, but they help its 92 minutes zip along. What is more important, and somehow consoling, is the vulnerability of nurse and patient, and their strange, intimate, but by necessity brief relationship. Dependency and need shuffle up against time and the lack of it, as well as the ending of it. One woman, given a clear bill of health, decides that she will leave her job as soon as she gets out of the hospital and greedily grab another chance at life. Another will not live through the night.

Apparently Benesch spent some time learning with nurses on wards, and her poise here feels professional and apt as Floria tries to get through another evening with harm to none – including herself. Editing is precise and modulated, building and relaxing, and starting up again. As with the clothes in the first shot, you see and feel the cycle – day, night, life, death. Viewers will be relieved as Floria when the night shift arrives; but the cycle continues and *Late Shift* pays tribute to those who somehow make it work. End credits point out how endangered Floria's profession is, making this not just a normal hospital drama but a global cry for help.

Fionnuala Halligan: Screen Daily

**Our next screening: March 6 2026
The Venue. 7.30pm**

The Mastermind (USA 2025) Cert 12

Kelly Reichardt has a reputation for slow cinema. Films like *First Cow*, *Certain Women*, and *Meek's Cutoff* place flawed characters in situations that they cannot control. In *The Mastermind*, her interest in these people finds expression in this study of J. B. Mooney (an exemplary performance from Josh O'Connor) who plans to steal works of modern art from a provincial museum to prove to his judgemental father he can make something of himself. But things do not go as planned.