

“So Not” exactly how it is, but a little bit yes

OUR CHILDREN SPEAKS TO LOCAL CLERGY ABOUT ADAM SANDLER’S LATEST FILM

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It was trending on Netflix, on online chats, in malls, and wherever and whenever Jews talked about the latest must-see movie.

“You Are So Not Invited to My Bat Mitzvah” was all the rage when it dropped recently on the streaming network. The movie, which got primarily positive reviews, was dubbed yet another funny Jewish notch in Adam Sandler’s comedic and filmography belt.

With a cast that included his own family - Mr. Sandler’s daughters, Sunny and Sadie Sandler, and wife, Jackie Sandler - and marrying them with superstar, Idina Menzel, who plays Adam’s wife and mom to angsty bat mitzvah girl, Stacy Friedman, the film, directed by Sammi Cohen and based on Fiona Rosenbloom’s 2005 novel of the same name, taps deep into a particular strata of this Jewish rite of passage and ritual, and comes out with a big laugh and a big lesson.

Our Children asked some of our local Jewish clergy - Rabbi Stephen Sirbu, rabbi of Temple Emeth in Teaneck, and Cantor Barbra Lieberstein - their thoughts on the film.

Our Children: First, did you enjoy or not enjoy the movie?

Rabbi Sirbu: I liked the movie. The characters were all quirky but realistic, and the family dynamics were a lot of fun.

Cantor Barbra: Yes, it was enjoyable. It made you laugh.

Our Children: From your vantage point, how accurate was the depiction of the contemporary bat mitzvah?

Rabbi Sirbu: I think the most accurate part



Cantor Barbra Lieberstein



Rabbi Stephen Sirbu

was how so many different elements go into the planning of a bat mitzvah: the video, the DJ, the dress, the mitzvah project. It’s almost easy to forget the study and preparation that has to happen at the same time.

Cantor Barbra: Some of the components of the movie were accurate. For instance, working on a mitzvah project is a way for the bar/bat mitzvah student to give back to the community. In past experience, when working at synagogues prior to starting my own b’nai mitzvah business 15 years ago, it was customary for the cantors to teach the b’nai mitzvah students their Torah & Haftarah verses. The rabbi usually worked with the students on the D’var Torah (speech about their Torah and/or Haftarah portion).

Our Children: How accurate was the portrayal of the rabbi and cantor?

Rabbi Sirbu: Rabbi Rebecca is exactly how I picture Adam Sandler creating a rabbi. She is out there! She connects with the kids by not being too serious, but never diminishes Judaism in the process. I don’t know any rabbi with a treadmill in their office, but we have all had to sit with a student, look them in the eye and tell them to focus on practicing their Torah portion—or else! I thought she did it with firmness and sensitivity.

Cantor Barbra: It seemed like the cantor was portrayed as the comedic sidekick to the rabbi. All he did was play guitar & create silly words. As an ordained cantor, we do so much more. We teach the prayers, the melodies, conduct the choirs, chaplaincy visits, & co-officiate at Shabbat, Holiday services, baby namings, weddings, and shiva services.

Our Children: How many b’nai mitzvahs have you presided over?

Rabbi Sirbu: I’ve never counted. In the 20 years at Temple Emeth, I have probably officiated at over 250 b’nai mitzvahs. Most had just one honoree. A few had two siblings, usually but not always twins. Last year, two friends shared a service, which was a first for me.

Cantor Barbra: Over 500 in almost 30 years.

Our Children: What was your favorite, laugh-out-loud, line or scene in the movie?

Rabbi Sirbu: I loved it when Adam Sandler came out to the movie theater concession stand wearing a bath robe while his daughter was talking to her friends. It epitomized how every teen fears being embarrassed by their parents.

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Cantor Barbra: The scene in the classroom between the rabbi, cantor, and students.

Our Children: Do you think this movie is “good for the Jews?”

Rabbi Sirbu: I was worried, but having seen it, I think this movie is “good for the Jews.” It shows how the Jewish community is diverse, and that b’nai mitzvah means different things to different families. It also shows how the synagogue can be a welcoming place, as a non-Jewish teen volunteers with the young children in the religious school.

Cantor Barbra: I think it shows people who may not be Jewish what a bar/bat mitzvah is and how families prepare for this rite of passage.

Our Children: If you were to tell the director to change something what would that be?

Rabbi Sirbu: The bat mitzvah girl was not allowed to run off the bimah to reconcile with her friend until she finished her Aliyah. But she didn’t say the prayer after the Torah reading. I would have had her race through second blessing to show her anticipation and only then have her leap off the bimah and out the door.

Cantor Barbra: I would advise to spend a little more screen time on the actual bat mitzvah service showing some of the rituals including putting on the tallit, singing a few prayers, holding the Torah, the rabbi and cantor blessing the bat mitzvah. I understand it’s a movie, but having the bat mitzvah girl leave the sanctuary in the middle of the service to

go find her best friend to apologize doesn’t send the right message to those who don’t understand the meaning of a bat mitzvah.

Our Children: Anything else to add?

Rabbi Sirbu: Adam Sandler has been a Jewish role model since he sang his Chanukah song on “Saturday Night Live” in the 1990’s. The song was simply about identifying Jewish celebrities. This movie is much deeper. It is about the way a Jewish family shows love for each other and the many unique joys of being Jewish.

Cantor Barbra: It was nice for a change to have a movie that highlights a Jewish ritual to the general public. Perhaps they can make a movie about Hanukkah so that children don’t feel left out when Christmas is dominated by the movies, TV shows and music.

Rabbi Steven Sirbu has been the rabbi of Temple Emeth in Teaneck since 2003. He is married to Rabbi Rebecca (not the one in the movie) and their daughter became a bat mitzvah in 2018. In those simpler times, there was only a photo montage and not a video. Cantor Barbra Lieberstein has built up adult and children’s choirs, developed curriculum for bar/bat mitzvah students and taught adult b’nai mitzvah classes. She is a member of the Cantors Assembly (Conservative Movement) the American Conference of Cantors (Reform Movement) and the Women Cantors Network. She is married to Scott Fergang and has three children.



B’nai mitzvah

Daniel Berger

Daniel Berger, son of Dalya and Jonathan Berger, brother of Orli, and grandson of Rabbi Mayer and Renah Rabinowitz, celebrated becoming a bar mitzvah on September 4, at Congregation Beth Sholom in Teaneck

Justin Kramarczyk

Justin Kramarczyk, son of Deena and Doron Kramarczyk, celebrated becoming a bar mitzvah on September 9, at Temple Israel & Jewish Community Center in Ridgewood.



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