

"Sixty Six"  
Chicago  
Chicago Tribune (541,663 major daily)  
Michael Phillips  
Review  
8/29/08  
3 out of 4 stars  
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'SIXTY SIX' ★ ★ ★  
Helena Bonham Carter stars in the Neil  
Simonesque tale. **PAGE 3**



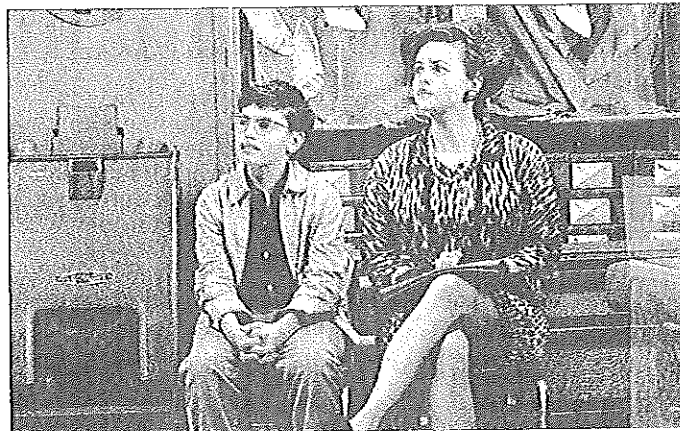
'SIXTY SIX' ★ ★ ★

## Fine acting makes a 'true-ish' family tale come fully alive

By Michael Phillips  
TRIBUNE CRITIC

Inspired by director Paul Weiland's childhood, notably a fraught bar mitzvah that coincided with the 1966 World Cup final, the British comedy "Sixty Six" recalls Neil Simon, but the good Neil Simon—the one who delivered commercial mainstream comedy with just enough honest sentiment to make it stick, as in "Brighton Beach Memoirs."

The film concerns the Rubens family of North London. Father Manny and his brother, Jimmy, are grocers about to be walloped by the supermarket opening just up the street. Mother Esther has her hands full with her wild hare of an older boy, Alvie. This leaves



Bernie (Gregg Sulkin, with Helena Bonham Carter) is awaiting a boffo bar mitzvah in "Sixty Six."

our young protagonist, Bernie, who is pinning everything on what he hopes will be "the 'Gone With the Wind,' the Cassius Clay of bar mitzvahs." But if Eng-

land makes the soccer finals, everything'll be ruined, no one will show up and life will be destroyed.

It's labeled a "true-ish story," and the results are

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cheeky fun. Whatever the period, whatever the religion, even the most casual filmgoer will recognize the coming-of-age territory. The script by Peter Straughan and Bridget O'Connor is longer on neatness than comic invention, but the acting is so good you don't notice what's not there until you're back on the street.

Gregg Sulkin makes for a highly sympathetic young Bernie, and Helena Bonham Carter is spot-on as Esther—tart, forthright, a little worn around the edges. Everything she does relates to her Job-like husband, played by the superb Eddie Marsan. He's the one you remember. While I wish the writers and director Weiland had played Manny's obsessive-compulsive disorder for some-

thing more than surface laughs, Marsan's stoic acceptance of all bad things coming his way, coupled with that look in his wary eye that says, *Worse things are coming*, adds up to a performance that feels fully formed and fully alive, even at its most deadpan.

Marsan is equally strong in Mike Leigh's new picture, “Happy-Go-Lucky,” in which he plays a paranoid driving instructor. It's a role (and a film) destined to attract more admiration than “Sixty Six.” But I like this movie, and even the mega-happy ending—a bit of a stretch given the level of adversity endured by Bernie en route—works, thanks to its excellent ensemble.

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**MPAA rating: PG-13 (for language, some sexual content and brief nudity)**

**Running time: 1:34**

**Opening:** Friday at AMC Pipers Alley and the AMC Northbrook Court.

**Starring:** Gregg Sulkin (Bernie); Eddie Marsan (Manny); Helena Bonham Carter (Esther); Stephen Rea (Dr. Barrie); Ben Newton (Alvie)

**Directed by:** Paul Weiland; written by Peter Straughan and Bridget O'Connor; photographed by Daniel Landin; edited by Paul Tohill; production design by Michael Howells; music by Joby Talbot; produced by Tim Bevan, Eric Fellner and Elizabeth Karlsen. A First Independent Pictures release.