

## Life, Above All

South Africa 2010

**Director**  
Oliver Schmitz

**Screenplay**  
Dennis Foon  
Based on the novel  
'Chanda's Secrets' by  
Allan Stratton

**Cinematography**  
Bernhard Jasper

**Original Music**  
Ali N Askin  
Ian Osrin

**Cast**  
*Chanda*  
Khomotso Manyaka  
*Esther*  
Keaboka Makanyane  
*Lillian*  
Lerato Mvelase  
*Jonah*  
Aubrey Poolo

100 min Subtitles

*Our next screening...*

**Mary and Max (Aus)**

Tue 7 February 2012

Dir: Adam Elliot

Wallace and Gromit style  
animation for adults, set in  
Melbourne & New York.

**So few African films get a UK theatrical release, but this year we're proud to be showing two – tonight's film from South Africa followed by *A Screaming Man* from Chad in May.**

Oliver Schmitz's *Life, Above All* earns the tears it inspires. The film is about deep human emotions, evoked with sympathy and love. By directly dealing with the poisonous climate of rumor and gossip, the film takes a stand. But in nations where AIDS has been demystified, *Life, Above All* will play strongly as pure human drama, and of two women, one promptly and one belatedly, rising courageously to a challenge. The performances by the two young girls are remarkable here. They have seen and internalized unspeakable experiences. Their faces are young, but their eyes are wise. Whenever I see such early performances by inexperienced actors, I wonder where they come from. No doubt director Oliver Schmitz had much to do with these portrayals. The casting process must have been crucial. But Manyaka and Makanyane have grave self-possession; they never even slightly overact. I met Khomotso Manyaka at Ebertfest 2011 and found her a cheerful, friendly teenager. Where did she find these resources? Where does any actor?

*RogerEbert.com*

In 1988, Oliver Schmitz made *Mapantsula*, one of the great Apartheid-era South African films, and with this adaptation of the 2004 novel 'Chanda's Secrets', he unflinchingly explores life in modern Johannesburg for one girl whose family life in an impoverished township is in freefall. *Life, Above All* is an inside-out portrait of a particular world, whose brutal, dark and unforgiving qualities are reflected in the film's scrubbed-away colours and shadowy interiors. There's an anger at the film's heart towards not only the hardships suffered by Chanda but also the reaction of her community, which proves itself to be curtain-twitching, gossipy and in denial in the face of its own destruction.

*Dave Calhoun, Time Out London*

Schmitz directs with an intensely personal touch, using Jasper's lush cinematography to create a sensitive mood. Everything is grounded in real life as seen through the eyes of this alert, expectant pre-teen. So there's earthy humour, callous cruelty and abject despair & not always where we expect to find them. The film cleverly addresses these urgent topics that it takes the breath away, catching us in the human drama rather than any moralising.

*Rich Cline, shadowsonthewall.co.uk*

