



BIG SONIA

Released in Theaters November 17, 2017

TRT: 93 mins. (45-minute educational version also available)

Social Media

Web: www.bigsonia.com

FB: [facebook/bigsoniamovie](https://www.facebook.com/bigsoniamovie)

Twitter: [@bigsoniamovie](https://twitter.com/bigsoniamovie)

Instagram: [#bigsoniamovie](https://www.instagram.com/bigsoniamovie)

Contacts

Theatrical Booking: jim@argotpictures.com, 646-732.3725

PR / Press: leah@inflatablefilm.com, 425-283-9504

Community Screenings: denae@filmsprout.org, 646-688-4488

FESTIVALS & AWARDS

- Festival premiere at DOC NYC & Napa Film Festival in Nov 2016 | Theatrical premiere Nov 2017
- Screened at 63 film festivals around the globe since Nov 2016
- 18 awards to-date including:
- **Social Media Impact Award Finalist (SIMA)**, 2018
- **Grand Jury Prize: Best Documentary**, Barcelona International Film Festival, 2017
- **Best Film Grand Prize**, Cleveland International Film Festival, 2017 (\$10,000 cash prize)
- **Best Documentary**, Napa Film Festival, 2016 (\$10,000 cash prize)
- **Best Documentary**, Dallas VideoFest, 2017
- **Best Documentary**, Monadnock International Film Festival, 2017
- **Best Documentary**, Wilbur Award for Religious Communicators, 2017
- **Best Heartland Documentary**, Kansas City Film Festival, 2017
- **Best Local Film**, Movie Trip Cinema (Kansas City), 2017
- **Jury Award**, Most Lovable Character, BendFilm, 2017
- **AARP Movies For Grownups Nominee**, 2017
- **Shanghai International Film Festival** (only US-made doc in competition), 2017
- **Audience Award**, Napa Film Festival, 2016
- **Audience Award**, Seattle Jewish Film Festival, 2017
- **Audience Award**, Philadelphia Jewish Film Festival, 2017
- **Audience Award**, Mendocino Film Festival, 2017
- **Audience Award**, Berkshire Jewish Film Festival, 2017
- **Audience Award**, Best Documentary, Tallgrass Film Festival, 2017 (\$2,500 cash prize)

SHORT SYNOPSIS

In the last store in a defunct shopping mall, 91-year-old Sonia Warshawski—great-grandmother, businesswoman, and Holocaust survivor—runs the tailor shop she’s owned for more than thirty years. But when she’s served an eviction notice, the specter of retirement prompts Sonia to revisit her harrowing past as a refugee and witness to genocide. A poignant story of generational trauma and healing, BIG SONIA also offers a laugh-out-loud-funny portrait of the power of love to triumph over bigotry, and the power of truth-telling to heal us all.

LONG SYNOPSIS

For years, Sonia Warshawski (91) has been an inspirational public speaker at schools and prisons, where her stories of surviving the Holocaust as a teenager have inspired countless people who once felt their own traumas would leave them broken forever. But when Sonia is served an eviction notice for her iconic tailor shop (in a dead mall), she's confronted with an agonizing decision: either open up a new shop or retire. Ironically, Sonia’s shop is the last open business in an otherwise desolate Kansas City mall, but it contains enough color and liveliness to make up for the entire empty complex. For a woman who admits she stays busy “to keep the dark parts away,” facing retirement dredges up fears she’d long forgot she had, and her horrific past resurfaces. BIG SONIA explores what it means to be a survivor and how intergenerational trauma affects families and generations. Will you let your trauma define you? Or will your past make you stronger?

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT (Leah Warshawski and Todd Soliday)

Sometimes the really big stories come from the smallest places. As filmmakers, we travel all over the world chasing stories about people making an impact. In making *BIG SONIA*, we realized some of those stories are right in our own backyards.

When we began filming in 2011, my grandmother Sonia Warshawski was 85 years old, and Todd and I had just started dating. On the heels of our last feature documentary, *FINDING HILLYWOOD*, our intention was to make a short film about my grandmother's small tailoring shop, John's Tailoring, and its steady stream of loyal customers. My extended family had long joked about using the shop as the subject of a reality show. We'd all long witnessed Sonia holding court from her counter-top podium, doling out marriage advice, recommending WWII books to teenagers, and doing interviews for local news stations. We knew Sonia had a gift for making anyone in her shop feel like they were the most important person in the world. And we knew the shop was her own refuge from the horrors of her past as a teenage Holocaust survivor. Once we started filming, however, it soon became clear that customers were drawn to John's Tailoring not just for gossip and human connection, but also for their own redemption. They came in because Sonia sets a glowing example of how an ordinary person can move past deep personal and historical trauma to find peace and heal others.

Still, our time with Sonia revealed her complex side. Her interactions with customers are very different from her relationships with her family, which have often been tense and tender, overshadowed by decades of survivor's guilt and post-traumatic stress. During the course of production, we began to perceive the trauma suffered not just by Sonia, but by my aunts and father, who had survived the trauma of a household gripped by grief and loss. As a third-generation survivor, I also began to see the ways in which Sonia's pain had branded me, the grandchild of refugees, and the child of a parent who'd long grappled with his own mother's pain.

Then, suddenly, the plot turned. Sonia's shop got an eviction notice. Her panic was palpable. And while we knew Sonia would survive the physical loss of her shop, we were also compelled by her store's symbolic role as a forum for human connection: a stronghold and a place of safety for Sonia and so many others. We continued to film, and our "short" turned into a feature. Oh, and in the middle of it all, Todd and I got married. The store was now woven into the fabric of our lives, too.

Despite featuring a Holocaust survivor, *BIG SONIA* is not a "Jewish movie," and it's not a "Holocaust movie." *BIG SONIA* is a story about humanity: our human potential to overcome even the worst of the world's sins and atrocities with compassion and understanding. It's a tale about survival, yes, but not only the heroic kind—the kind that is forced upon victims of genocide. It's also about the everyday acts of survival we all undertake just to be human: to overlook slights; to rise above bigotry, ignorance and self-doubt; to push for forgiveness even when our instincts urge retribution or bitterness.

We premiered *BIG SONIA* the day after the 2016 presidential election. We had no way of knowing then that the themes of our film would find new relevance. Sonia's life story has been called an antidote to the hate and fear we see around us, and we hope that is true. But the real lesson of *BIG SONIA* is that we've all got the capacity to combat the worst of humanity. Like Sonia, we all have the opportunity to create for others the places of comfort and connection where survival takes root.

FILM TEAM

LEAH WARSHAWSKI | CO-DIRECTOR / PRODUCER

Leah Warshawski (Producer, Co-Director) specializes in producing/directing documentary-style features, television shows, commercials, and branded content in remote parts of the world. She has a BA in Japanese language from the University of Hawaii. Her first feature film, FINDING HILLYWOOD (2013), won six awards, including the Critic's Award (Sebastopol Documentary Festival) and the Audience Award (Napa Film Festival), and screened at more than 65 film festivals. Before developing FINDING HILLYWOOD, Leah worked in Hawaii in the marine department for major features and shows, including LOST and HAWAII. She is currently co-EP for a feature documentary about the "personhood" movement in America: PERSONHOOD (2018), and she consults with filmmakers about outreach, marketing and hybrid distribution plans. Leah also co-founded "rwandafilm.org," a "LinkedIn" for Rwandan filmmakers and a tool to help grow the film economy in East Africa. This site is supported by a number of international partners, including Bpeace (Business Council for Peace) and The Academy of Motion Pictures. Leah is also Sonia's granddaughter.

TODD SOLIDAY | CO-DIRECTOR / DP / POST SUPERVISOR / EDITOR

Todd Soliday (Co-Director, DP, Editor) has directed, shot, edited and posted feature films, corporate brand films (Starbucks, Microsoft, T-Mobile), and music documentaries for major networks and companies. An avid snowboarder, mountain biker, vintage collector, adventure seeker, and world traveler, Todd's true passion is documentary storytelling. Recent projects include OUT OF LUCK (2015 feature doc), THE BREACH (2014 feature doc), FINDING HILLYWOOD (2013 feature doc), PLATINUM: THE MT. BAKER LEGENDARY BANKED SLALOM (2007 feature doc) and VOYAGE: ALONE ACROSS THE ATLANTIC (2006 series and pilot). For samples of his work, please visit www.toddsoliday.com.

ERIC FRITH: STORY PRODUCER

Eric creates films that have screened at top film festivals, including Sundance, Toronto International Film Festival, South by Southwest, and Seattle International Film Festival. These projects have received numerous awards and been acquired for distribution, both nationally and internationally, by Miramax, Dream Entertainment, Cinema Management Group, Off the Fence, Independent Lens, American Masters PBS, and Phase 4 Films. Most recently, Eric served as editor on the documentary FINDING HILLYWOOD, which premiered at SIFF in 2013, and screened at more than 50 other film festivals, winning two best-doc awards and one audience award. He edited director Megan Griffiths' EDEN (2012), which premiered at SXSW and was distributed by Phase 4 Films. In 2011, Eric both produced and edited A LOT LIKE YOU, which premiered at SIFF and screened at festivals around the world, winning 6 best-doc awards. Eric also edited THE HEART OF THE GAME (2005), which premiered at TIFF, was distributed by Miramax and was heralded as "...an Oscar level piece of work" by film critic Richard Roeper. Eric also edited and co-wrote SONG OF THE NEW EARTH (2013), and THE BREACH (2014) and edited DEEP BURIAL, starring Dominic Monaghan, Tom Sizemore and Sarah Habel.



ADDITIONAL CREDITS

(full bios at bigsonia.com/crew)

Rachel Igotofsky | Graphic Artist - <http://www.rachelignotofskydesign.com>

Brad Anthony Laina | Composer - <http://bradanthonylaina.com>

Dawn Norton | Animator

Doug Loviska | Assistant Editor

Dave Stewart | Graphics

Chelsea Mohr | Production Assistant

Gloria Baker Feinstein | Still Photographer

Executive PRODUCERS + ADVISORS

In Association with True Productions

Tom Wright | Executive Producer

Ni'coel Stark | Co-Executive Producer

Claude & Bertina Thau | Co-Executive Producers

Brian Newman (Sub-Genre) | Distribution Advisor

SuEllen Fried | Education Advisor

Lucy Bernholtz | Fundraising Advisor

Jennifer Tavernaro | Education Advisor

Todd Milton | Education Advisor

Finishing Services Provided By:

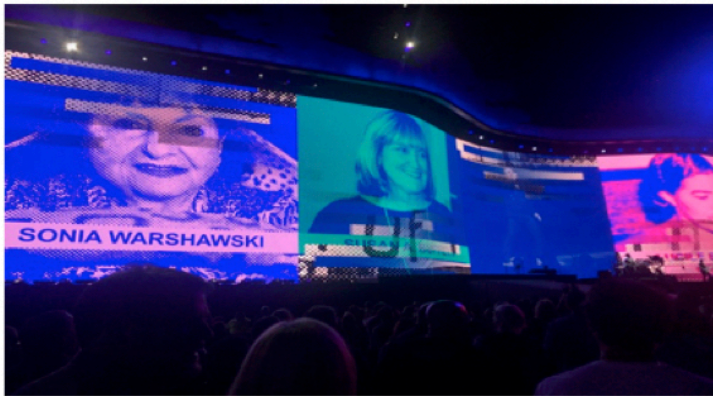
Skywalker Sound (Audio + Sound Design)

Lightpress (Color + Mastering)

IN THE NEWS & ON TV (recent features)

- **BIG SONIA is recognized by Congress** at the House of Representatives (Jan 2018) Video link:
<https://vimeo.com/250651753> (national broadcast on C-SPAN, 12k views on FB)
- **The Mayor of Kansas City Declares Dec 21 BIG SONIA DAY** (statewide, recurring proclamation)
Video link: <https://tinyurl.com/yakh9jxs>
- “But It’s a Terrible Hate What’s Going On Now” by Ruth LaFerla
New York Times Style Section Feature: <https://tinyurl.com/y8odc8lh> (online for millions of NYT subscribers)
- “Holocaust Survivor Sonia Warshawski Aims To Change The World at 92”
Extra TV Feature Segment: <http://extratv.com/videos/0-fqcsjbsf/> (national broadcast w/ millions of viewers over a 2-day period)
- “These female documentary directors could have been on the Oscar short list”
Boston Globe: <https://tinyurl.com/y9a3qojc>
- “How do you cope with the trauma you didn’t experience?” – TEDx talk by producer/director Leah Warshawski |
TEDx Video link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OkAMHQhabkU> (4,000 views so far)

- “Big Sonia has some big lessons for right here, right now” by Melinda Henneberger
Kansas City Star: <https://tinyurl.com/y8fmdkkt>
- **Sonia Warshawski honored by U2** as an Ultraviolet Change-maker Winner at Arrowhead Stadium – attended by 70,000 people (Sept 2017)



EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH & IMPACT (since Nov 2016)

- 45-minute educational version w/ 4 stand-alone scenes + 20 page curriculum guide created for educators 7th grade and above – available for shipping Feb 15.
- Screenings and director/cast Q/A's for approx. 4,000 **middle school** students across the US
- Screenings and director/cast Q/A's for approx. 5,500 **high school** students across the US
- Screenings and director/cast Q/A's for approx. 10,000 **college/university** students across the US
- Screenings at Catholic, Christian and Jewish schools, churches and synagogues
- Multiple screenings and director Q/A's at 2 different **senior living facilities** in 2 states
- Screenings and talk-back sessions at 4 different **prisons** across KS and 6 screenings at San Quentin
- Currently booking screenings across the US with **veteran's groups**
- High profile screenings in-the-works include at **Congress** (House of Representatives), **Disney** and **USC Shoah Foundation**