

Film Notes: Season 2025–26

5th March 2026

Late Shift

Cert 12 | 1h 31m

Country: Switzerland, Germany, 2025

Director: Petra Biondina Volpe

Stars: Leonie Benesch, Sonja Riesen, Alireza Bayram

Language: German / Swiss German (with English subtitles)



Synopsis

Floria is an experienced nurse, a calming presence in a hospital system that’s anything but calm. On a single late shift in an understaffed ward, routine care becomes a race against time as patients deteriorate, families demand answers, colleagues are stretched thin, and every interruption can mean life or death. As the night progresses, Floria’s professionalism is tested to the limit by the sheer arithmetic of too many urgent needs and not enough hands on deck.

Context and Craft

Director Petra Volpe builds the film around immersion and momentum: rather than giving backstory or big plot twists, she keeps the camera close to Floria as the ward’s pressures accumulate in near real time. The effect is less medical melodrama than workplace pressure-cooker – think *Bolting Point* but in a hospital - where the tension comes from triage i.e., what can be done now, what must wait, and what that waiting costs. A key choice is the emphasis on systems over villains. No one person is “the problem”; the crisis is structural and includes understaffing, bottlenecks, and there is a constant moral friction between ideal care and possible care. There is no time for small, human gestures (comforting a frightened patient, a moment of tenderness) as everything is at stake when time runs out. The film was inspired by Madeline Calvelage’s book about nursing conditions, which helps explain the documentary-like insistence on procedure, pace, and emotional labour, alongside a quietly thriller-ish edge created by the night’s escalating cascade of decisions.

Critical Reception

- “The pressure is on in a severely understaffed hospital, carried by Leonie Benesch’s committed performance.” — *The Guardian*
- “A cinematic tribute to nurses... elevated by the unflashy skill of Leonie Benesch.” — *Sight and Sound*.
- “Gripping, minimalist portrait that sneaks in a subtle thriller tension while staying focused on the psychological cost of caregiving.” — *Financial Times*

Conclusion

Late Shift is a study in care under constraint: a film that makes competence feel dramatic, and compassion feel expensive, not because it’s rare, but because the system gives it no room. By narrowing the story to one shift, Volpe turns everyday hospital work into escalating suspense, while keeping the focus on Floria’s steady humanity and the quiet brutality of impossible workloads. It lands as both an intense viewing experience and a pointed piece of social realism.