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66th Internationale
Filmfestspiele
Berlin
Panorama

عاصفة رملية
Sand Storm

BETA CINEMA PRESENTS A PRODUCTION BY Z-TEAM PRODUCTIONS WITH THE SUPPORT OF THE RABINOVICH FOUNDATION FOR THE ARTS, CINEMA PROJECT AND GESHER MULTICULTURAL FILM FUND
LAMIS ANMAR, RUBA BLAL-ASFOUR, HAITHAM OMARI, KHADIJA AL-AKEL, JALAL MASARIWA
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY SAHEL AL-OBASAN
EDITED BY DORON OFER
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS KANAN EL-DAR, CHEN BILAD
PRODUCED BY CARMIT BOUZASLO
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EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS HAIM MECKLBERG, ESTEE YACOV-MECKLBERG
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS ELITE ZEKER

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GMAFF ROTOR FILM Festival de Film Locarno Talents PITCH WINNERS OF THE JERUSALEM PITCH PRIZE 2016 Z-TEAM BETA CINEMA



SAND STORM

A film written and directed by
Elite Zexer

Starring
Lamis Ammar, Ruba Blal-Asfour, Haitham Omari, Khadija Alakel, Jalal Masarwa

Producers
Haim Mecklberg and Estee Yacov-Mecklberg

Executive Producers
Rami Yehoshua, Moshe Edery, Leon Edery, Yigal Mograbi

Produced with the participation of
The Rabinowitch Fund for the Art, Tel Aviv and Gesher Multicultural Film Fund



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Pictures and film clips available on ftp.betafilm.com, username: ftpress01, password: 8synopsis



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CAST

Layla
Jalila
Suliman
Tasnim
Anuar

Lamis Ammar
Ruba Blal-Asfour
Haitham Omari
Khadija Alakel
Jalal Masarwa

CREW

Director/Writer
DOP
Producers

Line Producer
Editing
Music
Sound Design
Sound Engineer
Set Dressing
Costume Design
Make-up
Casting

Elite Zexer
Shai Peleg
Haim Mecklberg
Estee Yacov-Mecklberg
Kainan Eldar
Ronit Porat
Ran Bagno
Gil Toren
Ori Tcheckick
Nir Adler
Chen Gilad
Carmit Bouzaglo
Limor Shmila

TECHNICAL DATA

Israel 2016
Running Time: 87'
Frames / second: 25
Sound Format: 5.1
Shooting Format: 2K

LOGLINE

When their entire lives shutter, two Bedouin women struggle to change the unchangeable rules, each in their own individual way.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

As wedding festivities get underway in a Bedouin village in Southern Israel, Jalila finds herself in the awkward position of hosting her husband Suliman's marriage to a second, much younger wife. During the celebration, Jalila stumbles across her eldest daughter Layla's involvement with a boy from her university—a strictly forbidden liaison that would shame the family. Burying the indignity of Suliman and his new bride living next door, Jalila also tries to contain Layla's situation by clamping down on her. But younger and possessed of a boundless spirit, Layla sees a different life for herself...

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SAND STORM is the second partnership between Beta Cinema and the Israeli 2-Team Productions (Haim Mecklberg/Estee Yacov-Mecklberg). The film was already given the top award at the Locarno Festival's works-in-progress section.

LONG SYNOPSIS

Desert noon in a Bedouin village in Southern Israel; Jalila is hosting an awkward celebration – the marriage of her husband to a second, much younger wife – while trying to conceal the insult that boils inside her.

Her daughter Layla is preoccupied with a different matter. Her secret, strictly forbidden, love affair with Anuar was just unveiled by her mother. Jalila believes that the world is harsh and cruel, and the only way to win - is to keep your mouth shut, your head as high as possible without raising too much attention, and struggle from inside the limits of the traditional world surrounding you.

Layla believes that there are no limits to the world surrounding her. Everything can be hers if she only wished hard enough. But, as the story unfolds, they each fail in her individual battle. Their whole family falls apart and everything they believe in shatters.

Now, the two women are forced to understand that, if they wish to survive, they will have to start seeing the world from each other's eyes.

PRODUCTION NOTES by Haim Mecklberg and Estee Yacov-Mecklberg

We fell in love with an early draft of the script, with Elite and with her burning desire to make this film over four years ago. And we were working with her on the project ever since with the same passion we felt the first time she told us about it. Now, as it appears that this true labour of love is being so well received by everyone, we're as proud as we can ever be.

For many different reasons the production of the film was quite unique. Because of the way Elite works, because of the way she can make people believe in the project and make them not only work on it but rather be a part of it, because of the special Jews-Arabs-Bedouin combination of the cast and crew and because of the need to shoot in four isolated Bedouin villages in the desert.

Elite's attention to every detail of the production and total command of everything that appears on the screen was amazing even for a much more seasoned filmmaker. The pre-production was very precise. Elite decided and approved every prop, every piece of wardrobe, every colour, location, construction and what have you. It was well-rehearsed and the shot-list was tight. Everybody knew exactly what was expected of them in every shot of every scene. But on set, knowing that all the rest was already in place, Elite cared only about drama. She could spend four hours on rehearsing one scene, till she got exactly what the film needed from the actors and then shoot the entire scene in half an hour. And it worked. Because she was so meticulous in the work with the actors, the acting in the film is superb and because it was so well prepared the film looks great.

One special quality in Elite as a director is her ability to adjust. If everything we've planned for six months doesn't work on set in a specific scene, she will change it all, decide in a matter of minutes on the new way it will be shot and all the art items required to do it right, re-rehears her actors and come up with yet another great scene instead of the one that didn't work.

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One of the things we were most happy about during the filming was the Jewish-Arab-Bedouin extraordinary collaboration. Amidst all the hatred surrounding us we were a Jewish-Arab crew, an all Arab cast hosted by four Bedouin families, creating one film we all believed in and doing it with the outmost love and respect to each other. We shot in the isolated villages and went back every night to the hotel, had dinners together, went out as a big group or in smaller – always interracial – groups. And it was great. And we didn't want it to stop. And we all came out of the filming with close friends that resemble us more than we felt they did before the production.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE by Elite Zexer

Ten years ago my mother, who is among many other things a stills photographer, began photographing Bedouin women from various villages in the Israeli Negev desert. One day she asked me to join her. I immediately said yes, not knowing that going on this one day adventure with her would turn into the wildest ride of my life.

I've spent years meeting incredible women, whose stories went deep into my heart, until I realized there is no way I could avoid making this film. This understanding set off years of writing, and rewriting, again and again, and I didn't stop until I felt like my script was accurately enough conveying two main principals. First: although I'm an outsider to the Bedouin culture, the script must be as authentic and genuine to their way of perceiving the world as possible. Second: although the circumstances the film is portraying are quite extreme, the basic themes are very universal. In that sense, anyone could relate to it and even if the society and locations play a big role in the story - they do not make it a local tale.

After four years of perfecting these two principals, I finally declared my script was ready and set off to shoot the film. The end result - and given how this all began, how it could be anything else but this - is a story of mother and daughter.

INTERVIEW with Elite Zexer

In your own words, what is SAND STORM about?

SAND STORM is a family drama that takes place in a Bedouin Village in the Israeli dessert. It tells the story of two women, both dealing with life changing events at the same time: Jalila, a 42 year-old woman, whose husband had just married a second, much younger wife; and Layla, her 18 year-old daughter, whose secret, strictly forbidden love affair, was just unveiled. The two women have very different views of the world, and they each try to fight individually, but they fail. Their whole family falls apart and everything they believe in shatters. Only then they are forced to understand that if they wish to survive, they will have to start seeing the world from each other's eyes.

This is your feature film directorial debut, what inspired you to write the story?

After years of traveling with my Mother to Bedouin villages, meeting many Bedouin women who became very close friends and their stories became very close to my heart, I experienced one special encounter. Myself and my mom escorted a young woman during her wedding to a strange man, a man she only married to please her family, while she secretly loved another. Minutes before she met him for the first time, she turned to me and said- "this will never happen to my daughter". I looked at her and felt my stomach twitching. That's the moment I knew, that I had to make this movie.

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What was the biggest challenge in making the film?

The writing of the script took four years. I was writing a script about a culture that is not my own- their traditions, beliefs, customs, language- all were very different from mine. While understanding that this is something I could never bypass or ignore- and by this I mean that this film will always be of an outsider, still, I wanted to give it my best shot to have it feel as if it was an internal voice. So, it took years of rewriting the script again and again, until I felt like it was accurately enough giving a voice to their ways of thinking and of seeing the world. Of course all those rewriting did much more than portray the culture more accurately- each version of the script added something. Another layer, another message, another twist to the story. It deepened my understanding of the characters, what drives them, what makes them tick, and why. This all was incredibly helpful not only as a writer, but also as a director.

You spent multiple years interacting with Bedouin women, how did this experience help you as a filmmaker?

My film is influenced almost entirely by these interactions. The people I've met and stories I've come across, are more apparent on screen than anything else. My interactions with the Bedouins shaped every frame of this film. The script is fictional, but it is based on real stories, real circumstances, and I wrote it while feeling an obligation to make it as real as possible, not only because this is the type of films I connect to most- but also because I felt obligated to represent the people I've met in the most accurate way. This effected every other aspect of the making of this film, in the exact same manner. Art, wardrobe, make up. Nothing was invented. It's all based on real things we saw, and decided they were right for the characters.

Layla comes from a line of strong women, which stands out even more in Arab culture. Have you seen these tensions in your interactions with the Bedouin?

The women in my film live in a world which is bounded with very harsh rules, and they are struggling and trying to find out, each in her own way, just how much they can push these limits without breaking the system. Each of them wishes something else for herself and for the other. But both want to achieve it by fighting from the inside. These sorts of struggles, fights and incredible strength in women I've seen almost everywhere I went and I recognized it in almost every woman I met. They each realize it in a different manner in their lives- by running the house, by learning how to drive, by going to school, by getting a job, by insisting on marrying someone they had fallen in love with- and while writing the script I was influenced by my encounters with each and everyone of them.

Is Layla's tryst with the university student forbidden because Bedouin are meant to marry within the tribe?

Yes. There are two main reasons why it's forbidden- the first and most important is that women are not supposed to have any type of contact with strange men. This is essential for a woman's good name and reputation, and if a woman breaks this rule- she is shaming her whole family, risking their statue in the community, risking her sisters chances of being married to good husbands in the future. The second reason is that there is a very strong preference for marrying women inside the tribe. Marrying outside the tribe means she will have to leave the village, but their wish is always to keep their daughters close, to have them live nearby, and to keep them and their kids as part of the family.

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Why does Jalila have to host her husband's second wedding?

Jalila is hosting her husband's second wedding, not because she has to, but because it's customary, and she feels like she has to. She is his first wife. It's her household. She wants to remain an active part of the family, she wants to keep control over her own house, she wants to keep her status, and most importantly- she wants to state, and everybody has to see it- that she is the first wife. She is the one with the power.

What do you wish for the audience to take away from the film?

Actually, my desire while I was making the film was to not know or decide in advance what people will take away from the film. My film speaks about many different subjects- a struggle to change the rules while living in a society which is bounded by very harsh limits, modernism vs. tradition, determinism, mothers and daughters, fathers and daughters, the evolution of generations, disintegration of the family unit, and many more.

I felt like directing the viewer towards a specific subject would be diminishing to the many layers of this story. I wanted each viewer to connect to whatever subject, or subjects, he relates to most.

CAST

Lamis Ammar as Layla

Lamis Ammar is graduated the Theatre and Acting Department of The Haifa University. The role of Layla in SAND STORM is her first leading role in a feature film.

Previous acting experiences include:

WHEN WE'VE KISSED (short film)
CUPID'S ARROW (play)
THE EXEPTION AND THE RULE (play)

Director: Nayeff Khamud
Director: Sara Sibouni
Director: Sinai Peter

Ruba Blal-Asfour as Jalila

Ruba is a stage, TV and film actress.

Previous film and TV work include:

THE WORTHY
The Scriptwriter (TV series)
A.K.A. NADIA
INHERITANCE
MIRAL
FORGIVENESS

Director: Ali F. Mostafa
Director: Shai Kapon
Director: Tova Ascher
Director: Hiam Abbas
Director: Julian Schnabel
Director: Udi Aloni

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CREW

Director/Writer Elite Zexer

Elite Zexer graduated from Tel Aviv University, where she received both a BFA and MFA, the latter in film directing. Her previous films include the shorts *Take Note*, which won the Best Fiction Film Award at the Tel Aviv International Student Film Festival, and *Tasnim*, which participated in over 120 film festivals around the world and won several international awards. She also directed the documentary short *Fire Department Bnei Brak* before helming her first feature.

Filmography:

TAKE NOTE, short film
TASNIM, short film
FIRE DEPARTMENT, short film

2-Team Productions

2-Team Productions is one of the leading Israeli film production companies, focusing on cross-over feature films – films with highly artistic content, yet outstanding audience appeal. 2-Team's films both participate in all major international film festivals' including Cannes, Berlin, Venice, Toronto and Sundance, and are being distributed worldwide by reputable companies such as Beta Cinema, Films Boutique, Pyramide International, The Samuel Goldwyn Company and Memento.

Filmography:

2015 A.K.A NADIA	Director: Tova Ascher
2014 THE FAREWELL PARTY	Director: Sharon Maymon, Tal Granit
2014 NEXT TO HER	Director: Asaf Korman
2013 A TALE OF A WOLF	Director: Moshe Alpert
2013 HOUSE OF FUN	Director: Vitali Krivich
2010 THE HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGER	Director: Eran Riklis

WORLD SALES – BETA CINEMA

World sales and co-financing company Beta Cinema has established itself as a "boutique-operation" for quality feature films that combine commercial viability with artistic integrity. Prime examples are Oscar winners and worldwide B.O. hits like [THE LIVES OF OTHERS](#), [IL DIVO](#), [MONGOL](#) and [DOWNFALL](#).

Current highlights include Oliver Hirschbiegel's widely sold thematic follow-up, [13 MINUTES](#), and the Emma Watson, Daniel Brühl, Mikael Nyqvist thriller [COLONIA](#).

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