



Inside *The Bubble* of Israel and Palestine

An interview with Eytan Fox
by John Esther

Bodies of land, flesh, politics and families collide in the latest film by Eytan Fox, director of the acclaimed *Yossi & Jagger* and *Walk on Water*.

Screening 9 p.m. Oct. 16 at Cinema 21 as part of the Portland Lesbian & Gay Film Festival, *The Bubble* follows Noam (Ohad Knoffler), Yali (Alon Friedman) and Lula (Daniela Wircer), three young progressive Israelis sharing an apartment in Tel Aviv. Looking for love and justice for all, their plights take on an addition layer of meaning when Noam falls in love with Ashraf (Yousef "Joe" Sweid), a Palestinian with a secret he must hide from his family and friends back home.

In this exclusive interview, I spoke with Fox about the film and its place in western Asia.

John Esther: In some ways the story is autobiographical.

Eytan Fox: I was also very influenced by mother. She was an American woman who moved to Israel with her husband and three sons. After the initial shock from moving to Manhattan to Jerusalem in 1967, she kind of got her act together and she decided to do whatever she could to make Israel a better place. She worked on relationships between Israelis and Arabs, Israelis and Palestinians. As a city planner she was given all the neighborhoods of East Jerusalem—Palestinian neighborhoods. She fought so many

battles against house demolitions. She introduced us [kids] to the many Palestinian friends of hers. The way Noam grows up was really how I grew up.

JE: Why are most of the songs sung in English?

EF: Music has always been very important in my films. I try to use music to characterize a world and the people we're dealing with. I wanted to use Coldplay, and people said: "You can't, it's much too commercial. Your characters are alternative." So they started giving me the names to all these bands. I consider myself a connoisseur of alternative, pop, rock and Nüü, but these were bands I didn't know. You go into these record places—like the ones I grew up with—and it's frightening to ask the shopkeeper for some record because he might snub you. It's not "too alternative enough." They can be very snobbish. These people are also snobs about Hebrew music.

JE: Once Yali makes an offhand quip about Michel Foucault to Noam, the film took on a different reading for me. What influence has Foucault had on your work?

EF: My understanding of Michel Foucault is very limited.



Eytan Fox

I asked my philosopher friends to give me a briefing on Foucault [laughs], and I found it very interesting. I should know it better, because in the list of famous, important gay men that we like to wave around, Foucault is very high on the list. But when I was working on *The Bubble* I wasn't using any of Foucault's thoughts.

JE: In general, how do Israelis feel about homosexuals in the armed forces?

EF: If you have all of your arms and legs and you are healthy, you're supposed to go for your three years of military duty. You can try to use your homosexuality to leave the army. You can come in and say again and again to a superior, "I can't handle the shower with all the boys together." [Laughs] I know people who did that.

JE: How do Israelis negotiate their notions of democracy, freedom and tolerance for their own citizens with the suppression of people in other territories bordering Israel?

EF: I was trying to show that contradiction in the film. You look at Tel Aviv and go, "What an open-minded, democratic society," but that's only for Israeli and Jewish citizens. **JO**



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