



Hiam Abbass in *Lemon Tree*

Uprooted

The fate of a lemon grove in the Middle East

LEMON TREE: Directed by Eran Riklis. Written by Riklis and Suha Arraf. Cinematography, Rainer Klausmann. Music, Habib Shehadeh Hanna. Starring Hiam Abbass, Rona Lipaz-Michael, Ali Suliman and Doron Tavori. IFC Films, 2008. Unrated. 106 minutes. ★★☆☆☆

Although *Lemon Tree* is an Israeli film by a distinguished Israeli director (Eran Riklis, *The Syrian Bride*), Americans will recognize the central farce at work in *Lemon Tree*, in which lemons are declared a threat to national security. Not lemons disguised as grenades or lemon-flavored poison, mind you, but tree-hanging lemons, or rather a grove of them. In *Lemon Tree*, an old orchard comes under the scrutiny of the Israeli defense forces when the defense minister, played by Doron Tavori, moves across the street with his wife. The minister's presence threatens the existence

of the grove — to his handlers, who see danger in every cloud, the trees are a terrorist-filled thicket — but the minister's wife has other ideas. *Lemon Tree* is many-sided thing, including an astute political drama, but the film ultimately is about two women, both strong and beautiful in middle age, forced by circumstance into a rivalry even as they're trapped by their restrictive cultures.

The quiet, proud owner of the grove is Salma Zidane, a Palestinian played by the resplendent Hiam Abbass (*The Visitor*). The grove was her father's, then her husband's, then hers alone upon her husband's death. Salma is a lonely woman who, at the outset of *Lemon Tree*, doesn't realize her own strength. When the minister's guards encircle her trees with a fence, effectively killing them off, she scales the

fence to give the trees water. When she's served notice of the grove's removal, she takes the state of Israel to their Supreme Court. All the while, the minister's wife, Mira (Rona Lipaz-Michael), looks on, her sympathy deepening with each passing episode. Is her interest a reflection of her dissatisfaction with her married life, or is it something more fundamental? Like Salma, Mira is confined to her role as the dutiful minister's wife, a position that limits what she can say and do. Both women are moral, circumspect and philosophical, putting them at odds with figures of authority. When one of them crosses the lemon divide, the scene underscores the courage they share as well as the futility of their situation.

Lemon Tree has the simplicity of a fable and the subtlety of a great short story. It is a quiet roar in the face of the fear-expanders who used 9/11 to advance their agendas, particularly in America and Israel, where state security was invoked to justify years of criminal activity. What the film lacks in drama it makes up for in spirit, particularly in the performances of Abbass and Lipaz-Michael, both actresses of international stature at the top of their game in *Lemon Tree*. You won't be blown away by *Lemon Tree*. It's not an essential film in terms of its music or photography, nor does it probe as deeply as it might have into the relationships comprising the film. As a stirring rebuke to paranoia, however, it's worth a visit. **EW**

Lemon Tree opens Friday, July 3, at the Bijou.

movie clips

OPENING OR RETURNING:

Documenting Taiwan's Indigenous Peoples and Cultures: Workshop and screening event presented by the UO's Center for Asian and Pacific Studies includes screenings of *Children in Heaven*; *As Life, As Pacang*; and *Carry the Paramount of Jade Mountain on My Back*, 7 pm Monday, July 6, and *Dear Rice Wine, You Are Defeated*; *National Bandit: A Beautiful Mistake*; and excerpts from Malakacaway (*The Rice Wine Filler*), 7 pm Tuesday, July 7. Both take place in 110 Willamette, UO, and include a Q&A with director Mayaw Biho. caps.uoregon.edu for more info. Free.

Ghosts of Girlfriends Past: Bit odd to use the *Christmas Carol* gimmick in the middle of spring, but anyway: At his brother's wedding, perpetual bachelor Connor (Matthew McConaughey) finds himself visited by the ghost of his uncle (Michael Douglas), who sends the ghosts of the title to keep Connor from screwing up with his childhood love (Jennifer Garner). PG13. Movies 12.

Ice Age: Dawn of the Dinosaurs: The scrappy critters from *Ice Age* return: two are having a baby, one might be losing his edge and another needs to be rescued. And then there's that troubling flying squirrel from the preview... PG13. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

Lemon Tree, The: The wonderful Hiam Abbass (*The Visitor*) plays a Palestinian widow who finds herself at odds with the Israeli minister of defense over her father's lemon grove, which the minister wants to cut down for security reasons. The minister's wife also plays a part in the story. *The New York Times* said *The Lemon Tree* "is a wrenching, richly layered feminist allegory as well as a geopolitical one." 106 min. Bijou. See review this issue.

Public Enemies: In the new film from Michael Mann (*Heat*, *The Insider*), Johnny Depp and Christian Bale face off as (respectively) gangster John Dillinger and the CIA agent on his case. With the wonderful Marion Cotillard. R. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

Two Lovers: James Gray (*We Own the Night*) directs this "romantic drama" about a troubled young(ish) man (Joaquin Phoenix) drawn to two women: the sweet, stable Sandra (Vinessa Shaw), whom his parents would love for him to marry, and the moody, unstable Michelle (Gwyneth Paltrow), who already has romantic troubles. Melodramatic and predictable — and predictably too kind to its leading man — but nicely shot and with a solid, unexpected performance from Paltrow. R. David Minor Theater. ★★☆☆☆ (3/26)

Usual Suspects, The: Does Bryan Singer's unforgettable debut feature film about an impeccable con still hold up to scrutiny almost 15 years later? I've heard yeas and nays. Now's a good chance to decide for yourself. R. 106 min. David Minor Theater.

Whatever Works: Larry David and Evan Rachel Wood star in the latest from Woody Allen, which is about an eccentric New Yorker (No! Really?) and the young Southern girl he meets. With Patricia Clarkson. 92 min. PG13. Bijou.

Films open the Friday following EW publication date unless otherwise noted. See archived reviews at www.eugeneweekly.com

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