

Strand Releasing presents

# ZAYTOUN

**A film by ERAN RIKLIS**

**STARRING STEPHEN DORFF**

*Official Selection: Toronto International Film Festival (Runner-up for the BlackBerry People's Choice Award)*

*Official Selection: AFI Film Festival*

**Country of Origin:** UK/Israel

**Format:** HD/2:35/Color

**Sound Format:** Dolby SRD

**Running Time:** 110 minutes

**Genre:** Drama

Not Rated

**In English, Arabic and Hebrew with English Subtitles**

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## **SYNOPSIS**

Beirut, Lebanon, in 1982 is a dangerous place for anyone, not least a young Palestinian refugee like Fahed. He skips school to sell gum and cigarettes on the city's streets, defying the wishes of his father and much to the annoyance of his Lebanese rivals who attempt to drive Fahed and his friends back to their camp. Making matters worse, Lebanon is in the midst of a savage civil war between its numerous political and religious factions and on the verge of being invaded by its southern neighbor, Israel, which is determined to stop PLO rocket attacks coming over the border. Meanwhile, ordinary Palestinians like Fahed, his father and grandfather exist in the refugee camps.

While the local PLO commanders attempt to train Fahed and his friends into the next generation of fighters, they'd rather be playing football, organizing impromptu matches in rubble-strewn streets in which a burnt out car's shattered front window acts as the goal. But Fahed's life takes a tragic turn when his father is killed in a bombing raid and an Israeli Air Force pilot forced to eject his F-16 parachutes out of the sky and is captured.

Having listened to stories all his life about the supposedly idyllic village his grandfather called home when Israel was still Palestine, Fahed is overtaken by a powerful urge to return to the land of his ancestors and plant the olive tree his father had been nurturing. That requires making a perilous decision: to free the captive Israeli pilot, Yoni. In return, Yoni must agree to take Fahed to Israel. As a guarantee, the boy swallows the key to the handcuffs he leaves on Yoni, who has little choice but to go along with Fahed's plan.

As their journey progresses, Fahed and Yoni must overcome bitter differences built up over generations in order to survive the dangers as Palestinian, Syrian, and Lebanese soldiers chase them across war-torn Lebanon. A tenuous friendship takes root and strengthens with every hurdle they overcome to reach a land they both consider home.

## REACHING FOR THE SKY: ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

From acclaimed Israeli filmmaker Eran Riklis, Academy award-winning producer Gareth Unwin, and producer Fred Ritzenberg, comes *Zaytoun*, the powerful and moving story of an unlikely friendship that comes to fruition in two nations on the verge of war. Yoni (Stephen Dorff) is a fighter pilot in the Israeli Air Force who is captured by Palestinian militia after he is forced to eject from his F-16 over Beirut in 1982.

Fahed (Abdallah El Akal) is a 12-year-old Palestinian refugee who makes a fateful decision to free the pilot following the death of his father in an air raid. Despite the fact that their two peoples are sworn enemies, they reluctantly join forces to achieve a shared ambition – reaching the Israeli border before Lebanon’s multifarious hostile factions catch them first – and discover common ground and their common humanity along the way.

*Zaytoun* is Unwin’s first production following his phenomenal success with *The King’s Speech*, the most successful British independent film of all time. On its triumphant march to collecting a vast passel of awards, including four Oscars and seven BAFTAs, *The King’s Speech* played at film festivals around the globe, including the Dubai International Film Festival where it was selected as opening-night film in December 2010. It was in Dubai that Unwin was asked by a festival representative if he would meet with Ritzenberg.

Ritzenberg, who had been developing *Zaytoun* for several years, was hoping his trip to Dubai might yield a producing partner. For his part, Unwin was mindful that he didn’t want his next project to be *The King’s Speech: Mark 2*, and found himself instantly intrigued by *Zaytoun*’s elements: its Middle Eastern milieu; the early 1980s setting on the eve of the Israel-Lebanon war; and, most of all, the poignant, touching friendship at its core.

“Even though I wanted to find something that was very different from *The King’s Speech*, I could also see that this core relationship between the pilot and the boy, who have to get to know and trust each other and work together to achieve their goals, was similar thematically,” Unwin observes. “As a person and a producer, I like stories that have a moral message, not in a strident way but I think it’s good when cinema uses its power to make you question the human condition.”

Head of development at Bedlam Productions, Will Emsworth, read the script and said, “It’s the best script we’ve had through the door since *The King’s Speech*.” Unwin agreed with Emsworth’s enthusiastic assessment, and immediately recognized *Zaytoun*’s potential to make an impact on the global stage. When Ritzenberg revealed that Israeli filmmaker Eran Riklis had played a pivotal role in *Zaytoun*’s development and was approached to direct, Unwin, a huge fan of Riklis’ 2008 film *Lemon Tree*, found it the perfect fit of director to material. In London, Riklis, Ritzenberg and Unwin met. “Within five minutes, we understood that we were going to make this film together,” says Riklis, who developed his previous films from their origins. “This was different for me but it was easy to say yes. We had a good relationship from the very beginning.”

## IN THE BEGINNING: THE ORIGINS OF ZAYTOUN

In 2007, the project managed to attract the interest of Ritzenberg, whose nearly 30 years of experience in the film business include producing and co-directing the critically acclaimed concert film *Gospel* and writing screenplays for major Hollywood producers like Joe Roth, Ted Field and Daniel Melnick. Ritzenberg also heads up the screenwriting department at the Berkeley Digital Film Institute, located in the Saul Zaentz Media Center in Berkeley, California.

While early drafts skewed heavily in favour of the Palestinian cause, Ritzenberg felt *Zaytoun* needed to present a fair and balanced portrait of friendship that aired both sides' views. "The first thing I did was try to create some kind of parity between the story of the pilot and the story of the kid," he says.

The next step was drawing up a wish list of directors, with Ritzenberg concluding that he needed to find someone from the region who could impart a sense of reality and integrity to the story. Eran Riklis very quickly became his top choice. One of Israel's most talented and successful filmmakers, Riklis made his feature film debut in 1984 with *On A Clear Day You Can See Damascus*, shortly after graduating from Britain's National Film and Television School. Several of his films have been selected for major film festivals, won numerous awards and met with international acclaim, while others, such as 1993's *Zohar*, have been big hits in his native country.

His films *Cup Final* (1992), *The Syrian Bride* (2004) and *Lemon Tree* (2008) had each detailed the strife-ridden, mistrustful Arab-Israeli relationship in compassionate, sensitive terms and, more importantly, he was an outstanding storyteller. "I completely fell in love with Eran's movies," says Ritzenberg. "I felt that his approach to telling Middle Eastern stories would bring an authenticity to *Zaytoun*, and would also be fair and balanced because he had done so in the past."

It was precisely that ability to be sensitive to the pain on both sides that appealed to Ritzenberg. When he sent out overtures, though, Riklis was initially reluctant, feeling he'd covered similar terrain in the three films he calls his "Middle East cycle" and concerned that the script in its current state was too dogmatic. Following a meeting in New York, Riklis emailed his observations and told Ritzenberg to get back in touch when they had a new draft.

"They were extensive notes and they were fantastic," says Ritzenberg. "They changed the structure of the story by focusing on the kid and his perspective. Eran said, 'Let's have the pilot drop out of the sky and the audience and the kid will project who they think this guy is and then layer upon layer we slowly get to know him.' That was a brilliant suggestion."

While Riklis went off to shoot his next two films, the Israeli Academy Award winning *The Human Resources Manager and Playoff*, the screenplay was overhauled. Then came the Dubai meeting with Bedlam Productions' CEO, the partner Ritzenberg needed who had the clout to bring *Zaytoun* to fruition. Recalling that fortuitous encounter in a hotel bar, Ritzenberg says: "He told me he would go to the end of the earth to get this movie made and he lived up to that promise."

## **TAKE-OFF: GETTING ZAYTOUN OFF THE GROUND**

With Unwin on board, the ambition level for the film was significantly elevated, from budget to behind-the-camera talent. Everyone saw the benefit in telling this story on a wider canvas. Further script development followed, much of it removing the lingering, overtly political elements. "Eran was always for getting rid of the slogans," Ritzenberg explains.

"I'm Israeli so there are certain places I won't go," observes the filmmaker. "I feel that if we're trying to get away from the politics, we have to present them in such a way that it's almost like offering a crash course in Middle East politics for the audience: 'The kid says this, the pilot says this – you decide.'"

Knowing that Riklis was being courted for other projects, Unwin made it his mission to move the film into production as swiftly as possible. "I think it's an interesting partnership for both sides,"

reflects the director. “For Gareth, it’s branching away from a hyper-successful film but also very British subject matter. It’s venturing into unknown territory and I appreciate his braveness on that level. It’s treacherous terrain, the Middle East, no matter what you do. Everybody has an opinion.” Unwin, too, is full of praise for his director. “He’s a great motivator. Everyone respects him so much, he’s so affable and he’s full of hugs when he sees people are getting down. He’s been the captain of our ship and someone who I’ve really grown to admire.”

*Zaytoun* was officially announced at the 2011 Cannes Film Festival and the first piece of the financing jigsaw puzzle fell into place when Pathe International came on board as international sales agent and French distributor. The Israeli distribution rights were sold to United King Films and Unwin was able to raise the rest of the budget through private equity, much of it from partners who had also invested in *The King’s Speech*. *Zaytoun* is flying the flag as the first official UK-Israeli co-production, while also qualifying for benefits under the France-Israel co-production treaty.

*Slumdog Millionaire* proved that audiences can fall in love with a film that mixes it up between English and local languages. *Zaytoun* follows a similar paradigm, with the story starting in English as Fahed flogs cigarettes on the streets of Beirut to a UN medic (Alice Taglioni) before switching to Arabic for part of the opening act, as Fahed and his friends roam through Beirut and Shatila, attending school and avoiding the older men who want to make PLO fighters out of them. When Yoni falls out of the sky and is taken captive, the film switches again to English as the universal language they both understand, ideal for a film its producers hope will be embraced by audiences around the globe.

## **VESSELS OF LIGHT: THE ACTORS**

The international ambitions for *Zaytoun* meant the project needed a recognisable name to play its leading man, Yoni. Stephen Dorff was one of the first to come up. Although originally conceived to be in his mid 20s, the average age for an Israeli Air Force pilot, 38-year-old Dorff is playing Yoni in his early 30s, an age when most pilots would already be in the reserve. But making Yoni older also allowed the filmmakers to increase the emotional stakes for Yoni by giving him both a pregnant wife, who is seen standing on a beach in a photograph that Fahed finds and taunts the captive pilot with, and a dead father.

Dorff found himself in the privileged position that all film actors crave following his much-admired performance in Sofia Coppola’s *Somewhere*, a film that provided his career with a nice uplift and put him back where he belongs as a much sought-after screen star. Having already capitalised on this career second wind with roles in American films such as *Immortals*, Dorff was ready for a new challenge – and found it in *Zaytoun*. Although initially concerned as to whether he’d be believable as an Israeli pilot, Riklis soothed his fears when they met up in New York. “A lot of Israelis look like Stephen,” notes Riklis. “He had the looks of an Israeli pilot and, behind a rough façade, a very gentle soul. I felt he was intriguing. When I look at actors for any role, I try to look for a secret and there’s something about Stephen which you want to discover.”

Dorff and Riklis also point out that Eric Bana, Helen Mirren, Jessica Chastain and Sam Worthington have all portrayed Israelis very successfully in recent years in *Munich* and *The Debt*. “Some people have come up to me and said, ‘You’re playing an Israeli?’” laughs Dorff. “But that’s what I love to do: be a chameleon, become different people. And since I’ve been in Israel, everybody speaks Hebrew to me like I’m Israeli. For me, every movie should be different and I loved the idea of coming here.”

Dorff arrived in Israel a few months early to work with a dialect coach and study Hebrew. Having tackled accents before, the actor felt comfortable with the challenge of mastering Hebrew-accented English – and even Riklis, who admits he was a bit worried at first, has been impressed with the results. Dorff also wanted to absorb local culture before the shoot began. “I wanted to immerse myself into the world,” he says. “My father’s Jewish and his parents were very Jewish so I experienced a lot of Judaism in America but being here is so different, coming to the Holy Land, seeing Jerusalem, going to the Dead Sea, being in Tiberias, shooting in Haifa and all over the country. I think the only places I haven’t been are Eilat and Nazareth. I’ve had a lot of fun and made a lot of friends here. It’s definitely a place I’ll come back to.”

Dorff was also granted exclusive access to many of the country’s air force bases, where he sat in a real F-16, learned the ins and outs of the major conflicts Israel’s been engaged in since its birth and met pilots, both active and retired, who shared their experiences of combat missions, supersonic flight and sometimes even captivity. “I met a pilot who had been captured and held by the Syrians for two and a half years in 1982,” says the actor. “He’s now a pilot for El Al, as so many of the retired guys are.” Towards the end of *Zaytoun*, Yoni is taken up in a helicopter. The pilot at the helm, Dorff discovered, happened to be same one involved in a dramatic rescue mission involving the flight partner of Ron Arad, an Israeli navigator taken hostage in Lebanon in 1986 who never returned, in which he hung desperately to the helicopter treads as the pilot flew back to Israel. On duty themselves, the young pilots Dorff met with had to tell him, “If the alarm sounds, we’ll have to stop talking because we have to be up in the air in five minutes.”

When it came to casting Fahed, one of the primary challenges was finding a young actor who spoke English, Arabic and Hebrew (the latter so Riklis could converse with him during the shoot). The casting net for Fahed and his circle of friends was flung far and wide, from Israel to Paris to London, with Riklis, Unwin and Ritzenberg looking at 400 kids before settling on their core group of five. Originally, Fahed had been written as a 10 year old but Riklis felt they needed to make him a year or two older to have a better chance of finding a young actor capable of undertaking *Zaytoun*’s most demanding scenes. Having worked with 13-year-old Abdallah El Akal before on his short film, *A Soldier And A Boy*, Riklis says Abdallah El Akal was the first name that came to his mind – but he still embarked on a long, rigorous process before finally giving him the role.

“I think it drove Abdallah a little bit crazy but I had to be sure,” says Riklis. “My fear was that he’s almost too professional. We had to bring him down to earth a little bit and make him more like a kid. But it turned out to be very easy because Abdallah is amazing. He’s very special and very loveable, the whole crew is crazy about him and he understands his role on a very deep level.”

“He’s just an incredible talent,” echoes Unwin. “He’s great as are the other kids who we cast to play his group of friends. They’re all so warm and engaging and one thing that has surprised us is the humour of the film. Yes, there are intense scenes and we’re paying due deference to the political situation but at the same time there are these amazing, charming moments with the kids where you can’t help cracking a smile or laughing out loud.”

*Zaytoun*’s two leading men had a shared background: both began working professionally at a tender age. Dorff was winning roles in sitcoms and TV movies from the age of 11, while El Akal started even younger, at eight. “Stephen was totally taken with Abdallah,” says Ritzenberg. “I think he saw a lot of himself in this kid... We all fell in love with Abdallah. He’s a beautiful kid with a really interesting look. I think everybody sees him as the perfect Fahed and maybe a reflection of themselves as well.”

On set, Abdallah has been as charming and engaging between takes as he is focused when the camera's rolling, mucking in with the crew, carrying the boom, directing traffic from one location to the next and so forth. *Zaytoun* will introduce the young actor to an international audience. "I told him that I'm relying on him for my next Oscar," jokes Unwin. "No pressure! But with all the kids we're very mindful of the story that they're telling and we counselled them at the start of the shoot that they were going to see some very hard things, and we'll have a decompression process at the end too."

They are joined by an international cast including Alice Taglioni (*The Prey*, *The Pink Panther*), Loai Nofi (*Lemon Tree*), Tarik Copti (*Lemon Tree*, *The Syrian Bride*), Mira Awad (a well-known singer in Israel), Ashraf Barhom (*The Kingdom*, *Paradise Now*), Ashraf Farah (*Pomegranates and Myrrh*), Ali Suliman (*Body Of Lies*, *The Kingdom*) and Joni Arbid (*For My Father*, *Close To Home*).

## **BEAUTIFUL COUNTRY: SHOOTING IN ISRAEL**

The 39-day shoot took place in April and May 2012 in locations across Israel, which represented the nation itself as well as neighbouring Lebanon. Unwin and Ritzenberg felt it was crucial not to sweep into the country already staffed up with British and European heads of department so made sure to source outstanding local talent too when assembling their crew. Alongside Danish cinematographer Dan Laustsen, whose credits include *Solomon Kane* and *The League Of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, and French editor Herve Schneid, who cut together *Amelie* and *Delicatessen*, *Zaytoun's* heads of department are all either Jewish or Arab-Israeli, including production designer Yoel Herzberg, art director Nir Alba and costume designer Hamada Atallah.

Unwin and Ritzenberg both recalling an episode on set that highlighted the divide between the Israelis and Palestinians as well as their ability to maintain perspective and work together in harmony "It was the third day and our script supervisor, who's Palestinian, picked up a rock and said, 'It looks like Palestine,'" says Unwin. "That triggered someone else to go, 'No, that's Israel you've got in your hand.' It ended up being this gag that this misshapen piece of rock was to one person Palestine and to another person Israel. No one was making light of the situation but it shows that people can deal with it on a practical, day-to-day basis."

While the two nations share a border and have similar terrains, sourcing locations that were both unique and convincing proved a challenge. The scarred urban landscape of 1982 Beirut and the refugee camp of Shatila were especially demanding to recreate, with a substantial portion of the budget earmarked for the art and production design budgets. The location team found neighbourhoods in the city of Haifa to dress up as the Lebanese capital and Shatila, even down to recreating Martyr's Square in Beirut. The filmmakers all felt that the first sequence featuring Fahed on the streets was key to establishing *Zaytoun's* era and setting. Having used Israel's diverse scenery throughout his career, Riklis feels confident that audiences will be convinced they're in 1982 Lebanon rather than modern-day Israel.

"When you're an experienced filmmaker you know how to utilise locations and make them work as if they're somewhere else," he observes. "I remember when I first saw Scorsese's *Mean Streets*, a film that I love, I was sure the whole thing was shot on location in New York and it was only later I found out most of it was shot in LA."

The locations team, headed up by Guy Raz, did an impressive job securing locations across this relatively tiny country, managing to surprise even the most hardened members of the *Zaytoun* unit and adding to the feeling that they were working on something special. Riklis was

determined that the road-movie portion of the film, which takes place after Yoni and Fahed have escaped from Beirut, didn't descend into a repetitive travelogue. "We used to joke, 'It's another hill, another mountain, another river...' It's like, How many hills can you take?" he laughs. "It was about finding a visually thrilling landscape and I'd say 95% of the locations are places I hadn't shot at before. I can feel it in the crew; they've been amazed by some of the locations. If I had to sell Israel to foreign producers, I would say, 'Look at what we've achieved with this film. You can do so much here in very short distances.'"

Cramming in so many locations also threw up logistical obstacles for the crew, who had to pack up and move on an almost daily basis. "We've been like a travelling circus," observes Riklis. "Almost every day comes a big move. But my feeling was that it's a challenging voyage for these two guys so it should be a challenge for the crew as well."

## THE SKY'S THE LIMIT

*Zaytoun* is not a film about politics. It handles its potentially volatile subject in a sensitive manner, resisting the sloganeering of both sides and focusing on an unlikely friendship that transcends both borders and the dogmatic assumptions of age-old animosities. Like the dreams of peace, the understanding that grows between this nationless Palestinian boy and Israeli pilot fighting to protect his country is fragile. But however small the step they take, it's still significant for bringing them closer together than where they started.

Riklis feels that presenting the events of *Zaytoun* from Fahed's perspective allows the film to maintain a sense of innocence but he's also determined to prevent it from slipping into the trap of sentimentality. "It's a tough film emotionally and yet I think anybody, even a tough pilot, if there's a kid who's dragging his feet behind you and he has a tree in his hand and he wants to get somewhere to plant it, you can't help but at some point like him," says the director. "The same on the other side. A pilot is a pilot from any country but he starts to see through the cracks and discovers a fragility. It's a film about discovering misperceptions and seeing them differently."

"Whoever I talk to loves the story," he continues. "I have no need to be politically correct but I have a need, both personally and as a filmmaker, to be fair, honest, respectful. I'm telling a story in which everything we show has a meaning. There are complexities to be faced in terms of trying to not state the obvious and yet be very clear. I have to acknowledge this film may reach an audience as wide as *The King's Speech* had."

Playing out against a turbulent backdrop, *Zaytoun* doesn't set out to provide a forensic analysis of events of the time in Lebanon and Israel. But the politics will be there for the camera to find: they'll be visible in bombed-out APCs, in the poverty of the refugee camp Fahed and his friends call home, and in the complex relationship between its characters, Yoni and Fahed in particular.

Fahed's future is not pre-determined even if *Zaytoun* can only end on a bittersweet note. On the set, Riklis was considering the possibility for a *Zaytoun 2*, in which Fahed returns to Israel as an interpreter during the peace negotiations. Amidst all the turmoil and pessimism, there are rays of light to be seen, stories of hope to be told.

"There's something that has touched each of their lives that will be there forever," observes Dorff. "It's what I loved most about the story: the humanity and the fact that if you stick any two people together for more than a few weeks on a journey like this, you realise that you're both kind of the same. At a certain point we all get stripped down and we all are the same, whether we're black, white, Palestinian, Israeli, Muslim, Christian, Jewish. It doesn't really matter. These two



characters go through a huge transition and there's pain and suffering along the way. But at the same time there's laughter, there's forgiveness and a friendship blossoms. It's a film to remind ourselves that we can all get along if we focus on the human connection between all of us."

Unwin sees *Zaytoun's* message as a universal one that could play out in cultures across the world, a story about an Israeli pilot and an Arab boy that could just as easily be about a Serbian pilot and a Bosnian villager or a New York cop and a kid from Harlem. "It's about that positive message of getting beyond the rhetoric and beyond the tubthumping to see that ultimately we're all just people," he says. Ritzenberg is in full agreement: "Some movies have an agenda; we don't. Our goal is to tell a powerful and entertaining story and let the audience draw their own conclusions."

"Put everything else aside, the politics and everything associated with that," says Riklis, "it's really a road movie with two guys who become buddies."

## **ABOUT THE CAST**

### **STEPHEN DORFF (YONI)**

Atlanta native Stephen Dorff is one of the most respected actors in Hollywood, greatly praised for his performance in Sofia Coppola's *Somewhere* (winner of the Golden Lion Award at the Venice Film Festival) among many others.

Dorff has been acting for over two decades. In 1990, he was one of 2,000 actors who auditioned for the lead role in John G. Avildsen's *The Power of One*. He got the part, starring with Morgan Freeman, John Gielgud and Fay Masterson. The National Association of Theatre Owners (NATO) honored him with the ShoWest Male Star of Tomorrow Award.

Dorff then portrayed two real-life pop culture figures: "the fifth Beatle," musician Stuart Sutcliffe, in Iain Softley's BAFTA nominated *Backbeat*, and cross-dressing film star Candy Darling in Mary Harron's *I Shot Andy Warhol*. He has also starred in Bob Rafelson's *Blood and Wine*, opposite Jack Nicholson and Michael Caine; John Irvin's *City of Industry*, with Harvey Keitel; and Stephen Norrington's *Blade*, opposite Wesley Snipes, for which he was awarded the MTV Movie Award for Best Villain; he co-starred in Michael Mann's gangster drama *Public Enemies*, opposite Johnny Depp.

Additional film credits include *Felon* which Dorff also executive-produced), *Cecil B. DeMented* (John Waters), *Shadowboxer* (Lee Daniels), *World Trade Center* (Oliver Stone), *Cold Creek Manor* (Mike Figgis), *Deuces Wild* (Scott Kalvert), *Entropy* (Phil Joanou) and *Tomorrow You're Gone* (David Jacobson). Most recently Dorff co-starred in the 3-D action epic *Immortals*. Upcoming roles include Alan and Gabe Polsky's *The Motel Life* opposite Hirsch.

### **ABDALLAH EL AKAL (FAHED)**

Abdallah El Akal was born in Israel in 1998 and started working in TV and film at the age of 8. He has worked extensively in both TV (*Prisoners of War*, *Arab Labor*), and film including *The Attack* (Ziad Doueiri), *Miral* (Julian Schnabel) and *Lebanon* (Samuel Maoz). Abdallah has seven brothers and sisters and lives in Tel Aviv.

### **ALICE TAGLIONI (LECLAIR)**

Alice Taglioni began her career as a pianist at the Conservatoire National de Musique in Paris. After taking lessons in theatre, she became more and more interested in acting.

Her first major role was in *La bande du drugstore* in 2001 and she has gone on to appear in films including *Sky Fighters*, *The Valet*, *The Pink Panther*, *Détrompez-vous*, *Paris-Manhattan* and most recently *The Prey*.

### **LOAI NOUFI (ABOUDI)**

Loai Noufi graduated from Beit Zvi High Performing Arts School in 2007 and has gone on to appear in the award winning *Lemon Tree*, *Out In The Dark*, *The Other Son* and *Under the Same Sun*. Noufi recently wrapped up filming Eran Riklis' new film *Dancing Arabs*.

### **TARIK COPTI (SEEDO)**

While working as a school teacher for over 25 years, Tarik Copti (born in Nazareth) also had a keen interest in acting and participated in his local theatre. In 1990, Copti became a professional actor and has starred in notable award winning films such as *The Syrian Bride*, *Lemon Tree* and *The Band's Visit*.

### **ALI SULIMAN (SYRIAN OFFICER)**

Palestinian actor Ali Suliman graduated from the Yoram Levinstein Acting School in Tel Aviv. With a career spanning over a decade, Suliman is one of the leading Arab film actors with film credits including Eran Riklis' *Lemon Tree* and *The Syrian Bride*, the Oscar nominated *Paradise Now*, *The Last Friday* (for which Suliman won Best Actor at the Dubai Film Festival) and *Chronicle of A Disappearance*, winner of the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival. Other notable film projects include *The Kingdom*, *Body of Lies* alongside Leonardo DiCaprio and Russell Crowe, *Inheritance*, *Under The Same Sun* and Peter Berg's upcoming *Lone Survivor*. Suliman was most recently seen on US screens in Ziad Doueiri's *The Attack*.

### **ASHRAF BARHOM (PLO FIGHTER)**

Israeli born Ashraf Barhom has been an actor for the last 10 years working on films including Peter Berg's *The Kingdom*, Ralph Fiennes' *Coriolanus*, Alejandro Amenábar's *Agora*, Louis Leterrier's *Clash of the Titans* and Eran Riklis' *The Syrian Bride*. Other projects include *Paradise Now*, *In the 9<sup>th</sup> Month*, *Lebanon* and most recently *Inheritance* and *300: Battle of Artemisia*.

### **MIRA AWAD (IM AHMED)**

Mira Awad is an established singer and songwriter as well as an accomplished theatre, cinema and television actress. Awad's stage work includes performances in the Arabic speaking musical '*Ad'kor*' (*I Remember*), the Israeli Opera's adaptation of the acclaimed musical 'My Fair Lady' as well in the Jaffa Theatre, an Arab-Hebrew theatre that is established on the principle of promoting greater cultural understanding between Arab and Jewish communities. Awad has also starred in *The Bubble* by Israeli director Eytan Fox, *Al'zendiq* by Palestinian director Michel Khleifi and *Farewell Baghdad* by director Nissim Dayan.

### **ASHRAF FARAH (KHALID)**

Ashraf Farah's breakthrough came from his leading role in the award winning film *Pomegranates and Myrrh* from director Najwa Al Najjar. Winning Best Film at the Doha Tribeca Film Festival, it was also selected at the Sundance, Berlin, Dubai and Rotterdam Film Festivals. More recently, Ashraf starred in Julian Schnabel's, *Miral*. Ashraf also stars in 'Balkis', one of the leading TV historical series in the Arab world this year.

### **JONI ARBID (ABU-FAHED)**

Film and TV actor Joni Arbid credits include award winning films, *For My Father* and *Close to Home* and Television series '*Shalva*' and '*Kachol Amok*'.

## **ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS**

### **ERAN RIKLIS (DIRECTOR)**

Eran Riklis is one of Israel's most acclaimed filmmakers. Before ZAYTOUN his most recent film as director was *Playoff* (2011), an Israeli-German-French co-production shot on location in Germany, based on the life of basketball coach Ralph Klein, starring Danny Huston. The film premiered in competition at the Montreal Film Festival and won the Best Actor Award for Danny Huston.

*The Human Resources Manager* (2010), an Israel-France-Germany co-production, shot in Jerusalem and Romania, won 5 Israeli Academy Awards (including best picture and best director) and the Audience Award in Locarno.

As director-producer and co-writer, Riklis enjoyed wide international success with *Lemon Tree* (2008), winner of the Audience Award at the Berlin and San Sebastian film festivals. *The Syrian Bride* (2004) also enjoyed worldwide critical and box office success and won 18 international awards, including Best Film in Montreal and Audience Favorite at the Locarno Film Festival. All three films were released worldwide to great success.

Previous films include the award winning *Cup Final* (1992, presented in Venice and Berlin), *Zohar* (1993, the biggest Israeli box office success of the 90's), *Temptation* (2002, based on an Israeli best-seller), *Vulcan Junction* (2000, a nostalgic rock & roll film set in 1973) and the political thriller *On a Clear Day You Can See Damascus* (1984).

Riklis co-produced the films *Three Mothers* (2006), *Burning Muki* (2008) and the 26 episode TV series 'Room Service' (2008-9) which he created.

Riklis created and directed the TV series 'The Truck' (2005, 13 episodes) and numerous major TV series and drama such as 'Cause of Death: Murder,' 'Me and My Family,' 'Lucky,' 'Lethal Money' and award winning documentaries such as 'Borders and 'The Poetics of the Masses.'

Riklis is a graduate of the National Film School in Beaconsfield, England (1982) and also studied at the film department of Tel Aviv University (1975-77).

### **GARETH UNWIN (PRODUCER)**

Unwin produced the critically acclaimed and box-office smash, *The King's Speech* which went on to receive countless award nominations and win four Academy Awards including Best Picture, seven BAFTAs, 5 BIFAs, a Golden Globe, two Screen Actor Guild Awards, a Grammy, two Broadcast Film Critics Association Awards, a New York Film Critics Society Awards and a PGA Award just to name a few. The film has taken in excess of half a billion dollars at the box office and is the highest grossing independent film of all time.

Unwin's first film as a producer was *Exam* which garnered a BAFTA nomination, and went on to win a Spirit and Dinard. Based in London, Unwin is the CEO of Bedlam Productions specializing in film, television and documentary production.

Unwin is currently in pre-production with *The Lady Who Went Too Far*, which sees Bedlam reunite with *The King's Speech* writer, David Seidler, a tale of female heroism in the early 19th century.

He is also currently producing *Spitfire Girls*, alongside Liz Trubridge ('Downton Abbey',) in collaboration with John Barnett of South Pacific Pictures, based in New Zealand.

Unwin is a member of the Academy of Motion Picture and Sciences, the British Academy of Film and Television Arts and a fellow of Ravensbourne College.

### **FRED RITZENBERG (PRODUCER)**

Fred Ritzenberg has been in the film business for over twenty-five years, writing and producing motion pictures. He produced and directed (with David Leivick) the critically acclaimed feature film *Gospel*, which *Variety* called "technically and artistically, the best concert film since Martin Scorsese's *The Last Waltz*. *Siskel & Ebert* gave *Gospel* "Two Thumbs Up," and the *New York Times*' Janet Maslin called it "wildly exhilarating."

Fred has written screenplays for some of Hollywood's top name producers, including *Brother Zack* for Joe Roth, *Woody* for Ted Field, *Officer Buddy* for Scott Kroopf, *The Limit* for Daniel Melnick, *Take it to the Limit* for Dick Clark Entertainment, *Pennies a Day* for Nash Entertainment and most recently, *The Cure*, for Mystic Films.

Fred is on the faculty at the Berkeley Digital Film Institute, located in the Saul Zaentz Media Center in Berkeley. He heads the screenwriting department. He has also taught at the Academy of Art College, where he developed their screenwriting curriculum, and taught hundreds of students the art and craft of scriptwriting.

Fred's FAR Films has recently optioned the book UP POHNPEI by Paul Watson, which he will develop as his next project.

Fred holds a BA and MFA in filmmaking from the San Francisco Art Institute and is a member of the WGA (Writers Guild of America).

### **NADER RIZQ (WRITER)**

### **DAN HUBBARD (CASTING DIRECTOR)**

Dan Hubbard has worked extensively with critically acclaimed director Paul Greengrass. Hubbard has cast actors for a wide range of films including *Ill Manors* (2012) by first time director Plan B and *The Damned United* (2009) directed by Academy Award winner Tom Hooper. Other film projects include *Chalet Girl* (2011), *Green Zone* (2010), *Harry Brown* (2009), *The Bourne Ultimatum* (2007), *The Bourne Supremacy* (2004), *United 93* (2006), *King Kong* (2005) and *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* (2001).

### **Yael AVIV (CASTING DIRECTOR)**

Yael Aviv studied acting at the Tania Balachova studio in Paris and was one of Israel's leading theater, film and television young actresses. She abandoned her acting career to travel in India, Southeast Asia and Europe. For a couple of years Yael designed clothes for her own label and later became involved in producing television commercials in Brussels. Upon returning to Israel in the early '90s she pursued a career as a casting director. Over the last twenty years she has helped cast some of Israel's most important films and television series. Her credits include Eran

Riklis' *Syrian Bride* and *Lemon Tree*, Eytan Fox's *Walk on Water* and *The Bubble* and Julian Schnabel's *Miral*.

### **YOEL HERZBERG (PRODUCTION DESIGNER)**

Yoel Herzberg has worked as a production designer for an extensive array of films including *The Attack* (2012), *Miral* (2010) and *Besame Mucho* (2001) and *The Flood* (2011). Herzberg was also the art director for Channel 4's acclaimed drama 'The Promise'.

### **DAN LAUSTSEN (DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY)**

One of the most recognizable names in cinematography, Dan Laustsen has a list of more than 40 Danish and international productions to his credit. He has won a string of awards for his feature films, television movies, documentaries and commercials. In the past 15 years, he has divided his time between his native Denmark and international productions.

In a career that spans more than 30 years, some of his best-known credits include *The Brotherhood of the Wolf*, *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, *Silent Hill*, *Mimic*, and *Solomon Kane*. Laustsen's other credits include *Wind Chill*, *Nomad: The Warrior*, *Darkness Falls*, *Running Free* and *I Am Dina*, which garnered a Robert Award (Denmark's Film Academy Awards) for Best Cinematography. He has received the Robert Award for four other productions with Danish filmmakers.

Laustsen served as director of photography on *Gummi-Tarzan (Rubber Tarzan)*, earning him the Special Award at the Bodil Awards (presented by Denmark's National Association of Film Critics), *Miraklet i Valby (Miracle in Valby)* and *Isfugle (Kingfishers)*, both of which also won Robert Awards for Best Cinematography. He won his latest Bodil Award for his work on Ole Bornedal's *Just Another Love Story*. In 2007, he received the Special Erik Balling award for his lifetime achievements as a cinematographer.

Dan studied still photography and was a fashion photographer before he decided to attend the Danish Film School, shooting his first feature at 25. The dailies of his first American feature, Miramax's *Nightwatch* (an English-language remake of the Danish film he also photographed,) caught the eye of director Guillermo del Toro, who subsequently hired him to shoot *Mimic*.

### **HERVE SCHNEID A.C.E (EDITOR)**

Hervé Schneid has numerous credits to his name including the Academy Award®-nominated film *A Very Long Engagement* by Jean-Pierre Jeunet for which he received a César nomination for Best Editing. Other credits include *Zentropa*, *Goodbye Bafana*, *Mesrine*, *Alien: Resurrection*, *Orlando* and *Amélie* for which he received BAFTA and César nominations. Schneid won a César for his work on Jeunet's 1991 film *Delicatessen*.

### **CYRIL MORIN (COMPOSER)**

Cyril Morin is a multi-faceted artist who has scored over 80 soundtracks and done orchestration for other artists. His score for the critically acclaimed *Samsara* (directed by Pan Nalin with Christy Chung), won honors at AFI, as well as the Santa Barbara and Melbourne Film Festivals. The soundtrack continues to sell internationally, earning Morin many dedicated fans.

Morin's many international accolades include two nods from the Auxerre International

Soundtrack festival for *The Syrian Bride* (Directed by Eran Rikli) and *Zaina*. He was nominated for a World Soundtrack Award and a European Film Award, and his score for *Little Jerusalem* (directed by Karin Albou with Elsa Zylberstein).

He scored Pan Nalin's *Valley of Flowers*, which won Best Jury Award at IFFLA LA. His music for *That Day*, directed by Jacob Berger, was called "a wonderfully varied and evocative score..." by The Hollywood Reporter. Other projects include *Autumn* (directed by Ra'up Mcgee), *A Simple Heart* (the Flaubert adaptation with Sandrine Bonnaire), *Ultimatum* (with Gaspard Uliel) and Eran Riklis' *Human Resources Manager*.

Recently he composed for the TV series 'The Borgias,' the Chinese feature film *I do* directed by Zhou Sun, and Eran Riklis, *Playoff* and *Zaytoun*.

### **ZIV KATANOV (HAIR AND MAKE-UP DESIGNER)**

Ziv Katanov has over 25 years experience and has worked on many films including Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List*. Previous work includes *Forbidden Love* starring Tom Hanks, *Not Without My Daughter* starring Sally Field, *Eden* featuring Samantha Morton, *Freezone* with Natalie Portman, Julian Schnabel's *Miral* and Assaf Bernstein's *The Debt* which inspired John Madden's version. Katanov has worked previously with Eran Riklis on *Lemon Tree* and *The Human Resources Manager*.

### **HAMADA ATALLA (COSTUME DESIGNER)**

Hamada Atalla is a fashion designer and has taught craft and design since 1992. As a costume designer her film credits include *Rana's Wedding*, *Divine Intervention*, *Man Without a Cell Phone*, *Bottle in the Sea*, *Alata – Darkness* and most recently *The Attack*, *Inheritance* and *When I Saw You*. Theatre work includes 'Jidariyeh', 'Eyes That See', 'Handala' at the Palestinian National Theater, and 'Gilgamesh He is Not Dead' and 'Shams' at Al-Hakawati in France.

## CAST

<b>Stephen Dorff</b>	Yoni
<b>Abdallah El Akal</b>	Fahed
<b>Ali Suliman</b>	Syrian Officer
<b>Alice Taglioni</b>	Leclair
<b>Loai Noufi</b>	Aboudi
<b>Tarik Copti</b>	Seedo (as Tarik Kopti)
<b>Ashraf Barhom</b>	Plo Fighter
<b>Mira Awad</b>	Im Ahmed
<b>Joni Arbid</b>	Abu Fahed (as Joni Arbib)
<b>Ashraf Farah</b>	Khaled

## CREW

<b>Director</b>	Eran Riklis
<b>Writer</b>	Nader Rizq
<b>Producers</b>	Fred Ritzenberg
	Gareth Unwin
<b>Executive Producers</b>	Pierre Buffin
	India Osbourne Buffin
	Stephen Dorff
	Simon Egan
	Goran Lasovich
	Jessica Malik
	Milan Marcovich
	Albert Martinez Martin
	Steve Milne
	Simon Olswang
	Jerome Seydoux
<b>Line Producers</b>	Efrat Bigger
	Saar Datner
<b>Cinematography</b>	Dan Laustsen
<b>Editor</b>	Hervé Schneid
<b>Original Music</b>	Cyril Morin
<b>Casting</b>	Dan Hubbard
	Yael Aviv
<b>Production Design</b>	Yoel Herzberg
<b>Art Direction</b>	Nir Alba
<b>Costume Design</b>	Hamada Atalla
<b>Makeup Department</b>	Ziv Katanov