

Strand Releasing presents

CUPCAKES

A film by EYTAN FOX

Starring Anat Waxman, Ofer Shechter, and Yael Bar-Zohar

*Official Selection:
Inside Out Toronto
Miami LGBT Film Festival
Outfest
NewFest
Palm Springs International Film Festival*

Country of Origin: Israel
Format: DCP/2.35/Color
Sound Format: Dolby SRD
Running Time: 100 minutes
Genre: Comedy
Not Rated
In Hebrew with English Subtitles

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<http://strandreleasing.com/films/cupcakes/>

SYNOPSIS

From Eytan Fox the director of YOSSIE, comes this extravagant and unashamedly entertaining Eurovision parody featuring a feel-good soundtrack provided by Babydaddy from the Scissor Sisters. Set in contemporary Tel Aviv, six diverse best friends gather to watch the wildly popular UniverSong competition. Appalled by the Israeli entry, they decide to create their own and record it on a mobile phone. Unbeknownst to them, their performance is seen by the UniverSong judges and selected as Israel's entry for next year's competition. With bright, Almodóvar-esque styling, irresistibly catchy tunes and a gloriously uplifting storyline, this laugh-out-loud comedy is a refreshing ode to music, friendship and romance.

EYTAN FOX - DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Eytan Fox was born in New York City, but as a child relocated with his family to Israel. He grew up in Jerusalem and studied at Tel Aviv University's School of Film and Television. His first film, *TIME OFF*, a 45-minute drama about sexual identity in the Israeli army, won the first prize at the Munich International Student Film Festival and led to the making of his first feature, *SONG OF THE SIREN*, a romantic comedy about life in Tel Aviv during the Gulf War. The film became Israel's biggest box office success in 1994 and was Fox's first time at the Berlin Film Festival. It was shown on TV worldwide, including Germany's ARD and France's Arte. In 1997, Fox created the prize winning TV drama series *FLORENTINE*, which examined the life of young people in Tel Aviv before and after the Rabin assassination.

In 2002, Fox directed the acclaimed *YOSSI & JAGGER*, which became an immediate critical and box office success in Israel. Premiering at Berlinale in 2003, it went on to become a worldwide box office and DVD success. It was an instant hit in New York and other major cities in the US, and remained on Stephen Holden's "recommended" list in *The New York Times* for over a month. *YOSSI & JAGGER* continues to enjoy a cult-like status around the world.

In 2004, Fox's film *WALK ON WATER* premiered at the Berlinale and became the most successful Israeli film ever abroad. Released in over 25 countries, it's the story of a Mossad secret service agent who befriends the gay grandson of an ex-Nazi officer. It was later nominated for Best Foreign Film in the 2006 French César Awards. His next hit, *THE BUBBLE*, enjoyed a worldwide premiere at the Toronto Film Festival, followed by a successful European premiere at Berlinale. Telling the story of two men who fall in love, one Israeli and the other Palestinian, the film moved audiences around the world and won over 20 jury and audience awards.

In 2009, Fox directed the Israeli Emmy Award winning musical mini-series *MARY LOU*. Based on the songs of famous Israeli singer Tzvika Pik, the modern fable with a musical message tells the story of a young homosexual who goes to Tel Aviv to find his estranged mother and ends up finding himself. *MARY LOU* has enjoyed both local and worldwide success, with continued demand at both festivals and on DVD. 2014 celebrates the release of the feel-good hit *CUPCAKES* – a musical comedy inspired by his experiences of the Eurovision song contest.

DIRECTOR'S LETTER

I remember my first Eurovision. It was 1973. I was nine and my parents had invited all of our neighbors over to our apartment to watch the contest, on what had to be one of the only televisions in the building, or it was the biggest. Either way, I didn't really understand what all the fuss was about and I even told my mother that "we are actually part of Asia and therefore not even supposed to be taking part in this competition".

"That's exactly the point," she explained. "Because we are a small, little country surrounded by enemies and no one in the Middle East wants us, the Europeans decided that this year they'd invite us so that we had a place as well".

Everyone arrived at the scheduled time. Every neighbor potlucked some food over and my mother even bought some bottles of coca-cola (a treasure usually reserved for the Sabbath). There was a tremendous sense of excitement throughout our apartment.

And then, Ilanit took the stage. With her flowing blonde hair, (which Mrs. Natanzon said, "she straightens with an iron") and a royal gown of a biblical theme, which was specially designed for her by Maskit, (under which Mr. Leiber said, "she is wearing a bullet-proof vest in case any of the Arabs want to shoot her") and we all held our breath.

When she finished her song, we all applauded and relaxed, only to grow even more anxious as the voting began.

Mr. Leiber said that, "they probably won't give us any points because they're all anti-Semites" and I hoped that he was wrong. Besides, I didn't have an idea what an anti-Semite was.

When Ilanit received her first points, we all jumped with joy and when she came in fourth place (two behind Cliff Richard, who himself had lost to Anne-Marie David from Luxemburg), we all decided "that fourth place was quite respectable" and that the evening was a great success and that next year we'd win for sure."

In 1978, Yizhar Cohen participated in the Eurovision in Paris and won first place. This was the first time Israel had won the competition and as is customary, the following year, the Eurovision was held in Jerusalem. I was, at the time, a teen reporter on a TV show for the IBA (Israel Broadcast Authority) and the producers asked me to cover the event. I was given an "all-access" tag and a bag (quite an ugly one at that) filled with records of all of the competing songs in addition to some souvenirs (an ashtray with the likeness of Greece's Elpida, emblazoned on the bottom of it) and that night, I walked around with a grin from ear to ear on my face, backstage at the event, in the Jerusalem International Convention Center.

I remember my parents bought me an elegant, linen suit for the occasion and when Israel had unbelievably won for the second time in a row with the song "Hallelujah", I truly felt like I was witness to an historic moment.

A girlfriend I had invited and I were the youngest guests at the after-party held in the grand ballroom at the Hilton, which at that time seemed to us the most lavish place on earth.

We saw the newly crowned Gali Atari, cutting a humungous, treble-clef cream cake with a golden sword. We ate lots of food from the various stations (the concept being that every country was represented by a station serving its native foods). I even had my first semi-homosexual experience when the lead singer from Genghis Kahn (the German entry) winked at me and asked if I wanted to go up to his room with him (I of course was terrified, like any other fourteen year old would be and did not go).

The years passed and a lot had changed. From a country convinced that it emanated pacifism and good-neighboring, we turned into a nation divided and conflicted. With its neighbors. With itself. My parents' neighbors stopped coming by to watch television with us. Everyone secluded in their own home, we were no longer the collective we once thought we were. People became consumed with achieving their own capitalistic dreams. Everyone already had their own big television set – no one wanted to watch TV together anymore.

The Eurovision had deteriorated as well. From an innocent music contest filled with first-rate pop songs and performers (ABBA, France Gall, Celine Dion), it had become an aggressive circus act. No longer a collection of sweet songs, but a grandiose and often ridiculous showcase (Vikings shooting fire, ice skating, background singers emerging from the soloist's enormous dress, etc.).

Meanwhile I finished high-school, enlisted in the army, survived the war in Lebanon, and began studying film at Tel-Aviv University – and perhaps when I came back to the Eurovision, I too had changed a bit. Watching the competition was no longer innocent. I had to apologize or justify it as a guilty pleasure, to laugh at it all.

In preparation for Eurovision 2000, two good friends of mine, both professional journalists, decided as a kind of joke, to record a cute dance song with their girlfriends (with an underlying political message) and send it to the committee entrusted with choosing the Israeli contender. A month later they received the astounding news that they had been chosen to represent Israel in the competition (it is important to note that none of these people knew how to sing, dance, let alone stand on a stage in front of an audience).

When the group Ping Pong (that's the name they chose) understood the gravity of the situation, they came to me, with fear and begged that I take them under my tutelage – that I coach, guide, take care of and most importantly, go with them to the Eurovision

During preparations and rehearsals, the band decided that if they weren't successful at singing, they would at least take advantage of the popular platform and say something of importance. They decided to up the political undertones by going on stage with flags from both Israel and Syria, evoking a message of peace and reconciliation between us and our Arab neighbors.

In the new Israel, the idea that this merry band of thieves wouldn't win was just as troubling as the fact that these "radicals" were going to wave the enemy's flag on international television. They became public enemy number one. Hundreds of articles were published in the Israeli press, essays and opinions denouncing their participation in the Competition.

My friends did their best but alas, came in close to last. When we returned to Israel, someone at the airport spat on the lead singer.

In the past few years, I have been occupied with making "serious films" I've traveled the world with them and in doing so have spoken, via those films, about Israel. One evening in a Berlin hotel, while flipping through the channels on my TV I came across the Eurovision. Suddenly I realized that I didn't even know who was representing Israel that year. I turned off the set and in a surge of momentum not characteristic of me; I moved to my computer and wrote the synopsis for Bananas (in 1973's Jerusalem, that's what we called the girls in our class that we were intimidated from and/or afraid of).

Observing from the side, one might think that there is little or no correlation between my previous films and one of this genre. I, on the other hand, know and sense the deep and clear connection linking them.

I feel that with this film, I want to set out on a journey back in time. A journey that might allow me to correct something private and maybe even collective – to bring back the Israel that once was/of the past to myself and the audience.

In this movie, the women that live together in the same building, much like the one I grew up in, will also be best of friends, the kind that watch the Eurovision together. In their honest innocence, they will sing a song in the contest which pays homage to the way the competition used to be. They, as opposed to Ping Pong, will receive many douze [twelve] points.

I know that one cannot really turn back time. I know that art today finds it more and more difficult to sway people from their point of view. Films that change something are usually of the serious nature, with a declared and distinct outlook on the world. But every now and then/once in a while, along comes a movie which acts a little differently. A high-quality, romantic comedy – a splendid, feel-good movie, which, like a great popsong, convinces you that everything is possible.

Eytan Fox,
September 2010
Tel-Aviv, Israel

CAST

Dana Ivgy	Dana
Keren Berger	Keren
Yael Bar-Zohar	Yael
Efrat Dor	Efrat
Anat Waxman	Anat
Ofer Shechter	Ofer
Lior Ashkenazi	Lawyer

CREW

Director	Eytan Fox
Writer	Eli Bijaoui & Eytan Fox
Producers	Marco Cherqui Lauranne Bourrachot
Music	Haim Frank Ilfman
Cinematography	Daniel Schneor
Editor	Ron Omer
Production Designer	Arad Sawat
Casting	Yael Aviv