

THE MATCHMAKER

**A FILM BY
AVI NESHER**

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BRIEF SYNOPSIS for AVI NESHER'S *THE MATCHMAKER*

Arik, a teenage boy growing up in Haifa in 1968, gets a job working for Yankele Bride, a matchmaker. Yankele, a mysterious Holocaust survivor, has an office in back of a movie theater that shows only love stories, run by a family of seven Romanian dwarves in the seedy area by the port. Yankele introduces Arik to a new world, built on the ruins of an old one. As Arik begins to learn the mysteries of the human heart through his work with Yankele, he falls in love with Tamara, his friend Beni's cousin. Tamara has just returned from America and is full of talk of women's rights, free love and rock and roll. The disparate parts of Arik's life collide in unexpected, often funny and very moving ways as he lives through a summer that changes him forever. Avi Nesher's latest film mixes comedy with drama as it tells a coming-of-age story unlike any you've ever seen before.

Film Details

Running Time	112 Minutes
Language	Hebrew
Subtitles	English
Medium	35mm
Aspect Ratio	2.35:1
Sound	Dolby Digital
Genre	Drama
Rating	Unrated
Country	Israel
Year	2010

FULL SYNOPSIS for AVI NESHER'S **THE MATCHMAKER**

Haifa, 2006: As missiles from Lebanon fall on the port city during the second Lebanon War, ARIK BURSTEIN (Eyal Shechter), a 50-something writer, makes his way to a lawyer's office with his elderly father (Dov Navon). It seems that YANKELE BRIDE (Adir Miller), a matchmaker for whom Arik worked as a teenager in the summer of 1968, died and left something to Arik.

The action shifts to 38 years before, when Arik (Tuval Shafir) first met the mysterious Yankele. While the summer of love has already come and gone in the United States, Israel in 1968 is more provincial. Foreign pop music isn't played on the radio and Israeli rock and roll hasn't been invented yet. The euphoria following Israel's victory in the Six-Day War is still going strong, and the teenage Arik dreams of becoming a war hero. But he is also a voracious reader and wants to write detective novels like those by Dashiell Hammett. Growing up in a quiet, respectable household in Haifa, Arik is uncomfortable about his father's past as a Holocaust survivor. He has heard rumors that all survivors had to commit horrific crimes to save their own lives – and he's even had glimpses of lurid pornography about sexual escapades in concentration camps. Understandably, Arik prefers not to think or talk about his father's life in Europe. But after Arik encounters the quiet, badly scarred Yankele and plays a nasty prank on him, he is surprised to learn that Yankele is a childhood friend of his father's and a fellow survivor. Arik can hardly refuse Yankele's offer of a job as his assistant, and is delighted when he learns that the work involves forays to the so-called Lower City, an area by the port filled with sailors, prostitutes, gambling, black-market goods, and movie theaters. Normally, his parents would forbid him to go anywhere near the Lower City, but because he will be working for Yankele, they allow it.

Yankele sees his matchmaking as a mission rather than a business, particularly because he tries to help those with disabilities or other serious problems ("I specialize in special people," as he puts it). He needs Arik to work as a kind of detective for him. Arik trails potential matches for some of Yankele's clients, to find out if they are hiding any damaging secrets. Arik takes to the job immediately, and begins writing a detective story about it. He also finds himself drawn to the people he meets through Yankele, including CLARA (Maya Dagan), a glamorous woman who hides a great deal of pain behind her perfectly made-up façade. SYLVIA (Bat-El Papura), who is part of a family of dwarves who were experimented on by Dr. Mengele at Auschwitz, also makes an impression on Arik. Yankele's office is behind the movie theater in the Lower City Sylvia runs with the other dwarves that shows only love stories. In spite of her small stature, Sylvia is a vibrant, beautiful and romantic woman. As Arik becomes more comfortable in the Lower City, he is surprised when an acquaintance from own, more respectable neighborhood, the local librarian, MEIR (Dror Keren), comes to Yankele seeking help finding a woman. Arik begins learn a great deal about the contradictions of the human heart, and get glimpses of how the Holocaust changed the lives of the people around him.

But while Arik is spending time in this new world, his home life is changing as well. He finds himself falling in love for the first time, with TAMARA (Neta Porat), a cousin of his friend, BENI (Tom Gal). Tamara, who comes from a large, protective Iraqi family, has lived in America for years, but is sent by her rich father, UNCLE NADGI (Eli Jaspán), to spend the summer in Haifa. The free-spirited Tamara shocks and entices Arik with her talk of women's rights, free love and rock and roll.

As he moves through the summer, all the strands of his life come together in surprising and often funny ways. Just as Israel is changing, Arik is changed by the past that haunts so many around him, and drawn to the new world of freedom that beckons.

When, as a much older man, he receives Yankele's legacy, Arik finally understands how much the matchmaker had to teach him. Avi Nesher's latest film mixes comedy with drama as it tells a coming-of-age story unlike any you've ever seen before.

An Interview with Avi Neshet, director of **THE MATCHMAKER**

Question: *How did you get the idea for your latest film, The Matchmaker, about a boy working for a Holocaust survivor? The credits say it was “inspired by” the novel, When Heroes Fly, by Amir Gutfreund. What does that mean?*

Avi Neshet: Making a movie that deals with the Holocaust is something you have to do eventually when your parents are survivors. But *The Matchmaker* is not my mother’s story, or my father’s. I knew nothing about my father as a young man, or my mother as a young woman. My mother only spoke about her experiences last year, and not to me, but to my children, on Holocaust Remembrance Day

My father had the ultimate 20th-century Jewish life: He was born in Romania, lived in Germany, moved to Israel and died in New York. A few years ago, when he became ill, I found myself full of guilt that I had never asked anything about him. And then it was too late. He didn’t have Alzheimer’s but his languages were all mixed up at the end.

I wanted to explore this subject in a movie, but it's hard to avoid all the clichés when you’re making a Holocaust story. I was very impressed by Amir Gutfreund’s novel, *Our Holocaust*, which came out in 2003. So I got in touch with him and told him I had been thinking of coming up with a story on this subject. And we started working together, talking out our ideas.

It was like two jazz musicians improvising together, then each goes home and writes his own score. He ended up writing his novel, *When Heroes Fly*, and I wrote the screenplay for *The Matchmaker*. He invented the character of Yankele Bride, the matchmaker, while the character Clara is my invention.

The film is about Arik, whose father is a Holocaust survivor. His family lives in Haifa in 1968. Like my father, Arik’s father never discusses his experiences. I know this kid intimately, although it isn’t my life story. Arik goes to work for Yankele, played by Adir Miller, a Holocaust survivor and matchmaker who describes himself as “someone who specializes in special cases.” Yankele works in what was called “the Lower City,” the downtown area around the port, at the bottom of the hill, where Yankele and others deal in contraband goods, prostitutes solicited openly, and there was gambling. There, Arik meets Yankele’s clients and friends, including Sylvia, a dwarf from a group of seven dwarves who were experimented on by Mengele at Auschwitz. After the war, they moved to Haifa and started a movie theater that only showed love stories. As Arik spends time in the Lower City, he begins to think more and also to understand more about the Holocaust.

Question: *Is the story of these seven dwarves true?*

Nesher: Yes. I had heard about them years ago and was fascinated. How could you not be? These seven Romanian dwarves survive Auschwitz, then come to Haifa and open a movie theater that shows only love stories, mostly Indian movies – it’s an incredible story. And I felt that introducing the audience to them and their strange story would parallel Arik’s journey. Arik begins working for Yankele, this odd character, and he meets the dwarves, because Yankele’s office is right in back of their theater.

Having the dwarves as characters was kind of an interesting metaphor. When I was growing up, we tended to think about the survivors as freaks, but the truth is, everyone has his own strange story. Although the larger society may see these dwarves as freakish, there is nothing marginal about the character of Sylvia. Yes, she’s a dwarf, but she’s a beautiful and assertive woman who challenges Yankele to find a partner for her.

At one point, Arik says to Yankele, “How can you fix this guy up with her?” Yankele asks, “Why not?” and Arik says, “Because she’s so short.” But when Yankele tells him, “But her heart is big,” Arik accepts that. He can understand it after spending time with Yankele.

Question: *Why did Israelis see Holocaust survivors as freaks?*

Nesher: Back then, as the new generation of Israelis, we were the ones put in charge of making sure this tragedy never happens again. The Holocaust was very fresh in people’s minds and it was a very difficult subject for me, and really for almost all Israelis, to deal with. It was something so terrifying and we were filled up with those slogans, “Never Again,” “Like Sheep to the Slaughter.”

At the same time, there was a strange and perverse culture, the Stalag novels, that looked to the Holocaust for sexual titillation. They were pulp fiction, with covers that showed all these scantily clad Jewish women being abused by sadistic Nazis, or strapping Jewish men kicked around by female SS officers.

These books, and *The Doll’s House* – supposedly a true account of the sexual slavery of Jewish women during the war – they all implied, that if you survived, you did something immoral. As a teenager, I was afraid of what I might find out if I spoke to my parents openly about all this. Making this film was a labor of love in which I finally examined their lives, in an indirect way.

Clara has a lot of my mother’s traits. She’s beautiful, smart and funny. My mother saw her whole family slaughtered in the most brutal way, and somehow her humor was her way of dealing with it.

Question: *Even though Arik learns a great deal from Yankele, you keep Yankele's past a mystery. We know he survived the Holocaust, but that's it. Why did you choose to tell the story this way?*

Nesher: There's only one scene when Yankele talks about the Holocaust, and it's not about his own life. It's a tragic story about the power of love. I preferred not to spell out Yankele's backstory, but to show instead how he copes with his loss. For him, matchmaking is not a chore or even a profession. It's a mission. He's filled with a tremendous love and he wants to share the redemptive power of love. He knows there's nothing he can do to bring back whoever he lost during the war. But he wants to help people who are desperate for love. And by getting to know him, Arik comes to love these people he meets in the Lower City as well.

Question: *What is the significance of setting the film in 1968?*

Nesher: The movie is about the encounter of Israel with the summer of love. After the victory in the Six-Day War in '67, there was a sigh of relief. And there was a shift from a focus on survival to an interest in life.

So the year 1968 is especially meaningful to Israelis. It's during this summer that Arik becomes interested in his best friend's beautiful cousin, Tamara, who has grown up in America but is spending the summer in Israel. She talks about rock'n'roll, free love – even though she doesn't really understand it – and women's rights. Just a couple of years before this, the Beatles were refused entry to play a concert in Israel by the Ministry of Interior, which did not want to encourage young people to listen to rock music. So Tamara and this aura of freedom she carries with her is fascinating for a boy like Arik.

Question: *You had a successful career in Hollywood. Why did you come back to Israel?*

Nesher: I had just made a very commercial movie, *Ritual*, with Jennifer Grey, when my father got sick and died. Some people go into therapy to cope with their grief, but I developed a screenplay set in Israel. It was *Turn Left at the End of the World*, which came out in 2004. I felt that making this movie about a family of immigrants from India in the Negev, who cling to their identity by starting a cricket team, a movie with a lot of humor, was something my father would have liked.

I was born in Israel, but spent most of my adolescence in New York, where I studied at the Ramaz Yeshiva, so I could keep up my Hebrew. I also studied at Columbia University, and I'm comfortable in both America and Israel. But when I was 18, it was clear that I would go back to Israel and serve in the army. I joined the Special Forces branch of the IDF. Then I got out and started making movies. My first film, *The Troupe*, which came out in 1979, was an irreverent look at an army entertainment troupe. It was a big hit and has become a kind of cult classic. Then I made *Dizengoff 99*, which is about

young people in Tel Aviv. After that, I switched gears and made *Rage and Glory*, a film that tells the story of a Jewish underground movement in the 1940s. It caused a lot of controversy.

Dino De Laurentiis, the producer, saw it and he convinced me to come to America and work for him. I started out working on scripts for Ron Howard and James Cameron, and a lot of other directors. Then I started directing as well as writing, and I made a bunch of tongue-in-cheek genre films. In 1990, I wrote and directed the sci-fi mystery *Timebomb* and the supernatural mystery, *Doppelganger*, starring Drew Barrymore. I made several more action movies, mostly for the HBO network, and the feature film, *The Taxman*. But after my father got sick, I felt it was time to be in Israel and make a different kind of movie.

After *Turn Left*, I made *The Secrets*, which is about ultra-Orthodox girls at a women's bible seminary in Safed. They get involved in helping a woman, played by Fanny Ardant, who feels guilty about a crime she committed.

Question: *The movies you've made since you returned to Israel – Turn Left at the End of the World, The Secrets and now The Matchmaker – have such different settings. Many filmmakers prefer to stay on familiar ground. Did you make a conscious decision to vary them?*

Nesher: Although the details may be different, all three films are about identity and redemption. People have told me I should call it, "The Others Trilogy." One film is about immigrants from India and Morocco in the Negev, the other tells the story of ultra-Orthodox girls and a Frenchwoman hiding from her past, and *The Matchmaker* is about the Holocaust survivors and all the others who don't fit in down there by the port. All are about people who are somehow not part of mainstream Israeli society.

Question: *The Matchmaker is already a huge popular and critical success in Israel. What has been the best part of this for you?*

Nesher: That my mother liked it. I was apprehensive about what her reaction would be. The first time she saw it, she was really shaken and she couldn't say anything. The second time she said, "Now I'm really going to see it." And she was very pleased with it. I hate to sound like Madonna, but it was a real secular *tikkun* [a Hebrew word that refers to repairing the world, particularly in a spiritual way] for me. There was a cathartic element.

ABOUT **THE MATCHMAKER'S** CAST:

ADIR MILLER (Yankele Bride) – One of the most successful Stand up comedians and television actors in Israel. He is currently at work on the third season of his hit series, *Traffic Light*. In addition to starring in this comedy series about three friends who are at different stages in their relationships with women, he is one of its creators and writers. The series was recently purchased by FOX Television, which has adapted it into a series starring Nelson Miller that will be broadcast in the United States this fall.

Miller got his start in the comedy series, *Domino* and has appeared on many other Israeli television comedies. He had his own segment on the popular interview show hosted by Yair Lapid, and then hosted his own show, *Adir Evening*. Miller has performed in a number of theatrical productions, including a stage adaptation of Avi Neshet's classic film, *The Troupe*, at the National Theater. That roll garnered him "Best Actor of the Year" award. He has also written and played in a one-show, *Adir Miller*.

He made his debut as a dramatic actor when he played a supporting role in Avi Neshet's previous film, *The Secrets*. The part of Yankele Bride in *The Matchmaker* is his first starring role in a movie.

MAYA DAGAN (Clara) – Had a starring role in Sabi Gabison's film, *Lost and Found*, which was also a television miniseries. She has worked extensively in television, and appeared in the series, *Domino*. Her other television roles include a part on the extremely popular Israeli soap opera, *Our Song* and recurring roles on *Ima'le* and *The Champ 3*. She has also appeared as a panelist on such comedy shows as *Night Club* and *Back Bench*.

On stage, her performance in *Letter to Noa* won an award for Most Promising Actress of the Year. She has also performed in several musicals, including *Chicago*, in which she played the leading role of Velma Kelly. She is currently performing in the play, *Love Isn't Everything*. She has been a member of the Beit Lessin Theater Troupe and studied acting at the Beit Tzvi School. She got her start in theater while still in the army, when she joined the Nahal Theatrical Troupe.

DOV NAVON (Yossi Burstein) – Has appeared in many films, including *Nina's Tragedies* and *The Schwartz Dynasty*. He began his movie career in the Seventies, and was in the films *Himmo King of Jerusalem*, *Winter Games*, and *Salomonico*, among others. Currently starring in the television drama, *Wonderful Divorces*, he has appeared as a regular on the sketch comedy shows, including the popular *Wonderful Country* and *The Cameri Quintet*. His theatrical career includes parts in *Gorodish*, *Kiddush*, and *The Last Secular Man*. He studied theater at the Beit Tzvi School.

He is about to start shooting the film, *Sodom*, a comedy based on the Bible story, in which he plays Lot.

DROR KEREN (Meir) – Keren, who received his theatrical training at the Mount View Theater School in London, recently starred in the acclaimed films *5 Hours from Paris* and *Aviva My Love*. In Paul Schrader's *Adam Resurrected*, Keren played opposite Jeff Goldblum. His extensive television career includes parts in the Comedy series *Small Country Big Man*, *Holidays and Weekends* and *Surprising News*. He recently filmed the series *Question Marks*.

He has performed with the theater group, *From the Other Side* and has appeared in the plays *Ashkaba* with the Cameri Theater, *Tartuffe* with the Gesher Theater and *The Producers*.

TUVAL SHAFIR (Arik Burstein) – The 17-year-old Shafir starred in the popular children's television series *The Eight*, as well as several other children's programs. He voiced the lead character in the Hebrew version of the film, *The Ant Bully*, and performed the Hebrew dialogue many cartoon television series, including *Pokemon* and *Avatar*. He has also performed with children's stage show, *Grandpa Tuvia*.

BAT-EL PAPURA (Sylvia) – The 22-year-old actress performed onstage in the musicals, *Annie* and *Oliver Twist* (in a production directed by Menahem Golan) for the Habima National Theater company. She served in the paratroopers during her army service, then became a producer and broadcaster for the popular army radio station. She currently hosts a daily music program on Radio Haifa.

ELI JASPAN (Uncle Nadgi) – Jaspan is a well-known Israeli Comedian and television personality who has had several shows, including one simply called *Jaspan*. This program received several awards, including the Golden Screen Prize and prizes from the Israel Academy of Film and Television. He went on to host the shows *Goodnight and Good Evening*, *Weekend* and *The New Weekend*.

On the big screen, Jaspan appeared in the films *One of Ours*, *Shell Shock*, *Time of the Cherries*, *Max and Morris* and *Fictitious Marriage*. He also played a role in the dramatic television series, *Chain of Command*. On stage, he performed in the play, *Adam*, at the Habima Theater, and in the long-running show, *The Weird Couple*. He has also performed extensively in children's theater. In the army, he served in an entertainment troupe and later became its commander.

Yael Leventhal (Tikva Abadi) – After appearing in the film, *James' Journey to Jerusalem*, Leventhal took roles on the television Comedy series *Life Isn't Everything* and *Good Night*. On stage, she has performed in many productions, including *Broadcasts*, *Let's Not Talk About It*, and *They Made a Movie About You*. She studied acting at the Nissan Nativ Studio.

Yarden Bar-Kochva (Nili Burstein) – Starred in the award-winning miniseries, *The Brown Girls*. She was also the star of the acclaimed television series, *A Touch Away* and *Michmoret*. She has appeared in many stage productions, including *Mr. Mani*, which was based on the novel by A. B. Yehoshua. For her army service, she hosted a television show for young people. After her service, she was as a stand-up comic, then wrote and performed in the comedy-sketch television show, *Platypus*. In 2009, she released a CD called *What Disappears in the Light* with Didi Shahaar, which contained several songs she wrote.

Netta Porat (Tamara) –18, starred in the *Pillars of Smoke* television series and has a featured role on the show, *Pilots' Wives*.

Kobi Farag (Moshe Abadi) – Performed on the popular children's shows, *The Pajamas* and *The Brothers Da Gama*. He started his career on a popular show hosted by the late Dudu Topaz. On stage, he has performed in several holiday shows, including *What Happened in the War*.

Tom Gal (Benny Abadi) – Appeared in the films, *Sima Vaknin Witch*, *Mount of Olives*, and *Hello, Cousin*. The 19-year-old has had an extensive career in television for teenagers and children, including starring roles in the shows *Rosh Gadol* and *The World According to Tom*.

Eyal Shechter (Arik as an adult) – Appeared in the films *Year Zero*, *Under Western Eyes* and *Bittersweet*, for which he also composed the music. He is currently starring in the television series *Wonderful Divorces*, and has acted on several other series including *Maybe This Time* and *The Naked Truth*. On stage, he won a prize for performing in the one-act play, *Murder on the Expressway*. In addition to acting and composing, Shechter is also a writer and editor, and has worked for YNET, *Ha'Aretz*, and *Time Out*.

ABOUT **THE MATCHMAKER'S** CREW

AVI NESHER (Director and Writer) – One of Israel's most influential directors, Neshet was born in Israel but spent much of his adolescence in New York, where he studied at Ramaz Yeshiva and Columbia University. At age 18, Neshet left Columbia to serve in the Special Forces branch of the Israeli army. Neshet's first movie, *The Troupe* (1979), was an irreverent look at an army entertainment troupe. It was a big hit with audiences, especially young people, and has become a cult classic. A year later, Neshet wrote and directed *Dizengoff 99*, the story of a group of young people in Tel Aviv. Next, Neshet shifted gears and made *Rage and Glory*, a controversial film about a Jewish underground organization during the 1940s. The movie set off a heated debate in Israel, and in 2001 was selected by the Lincoln Center Film Society as one of the most important Israeli films ever.

After seeing *Rage and Glory*, producer Dino De Laurentiis convinced Neshet to come to Hollywood. Neshet started as a writer, penning studio assignments for such filmmakers as Ron Howard and James Cameron. In 1990, Neshet wrote and directed the sci-fi mystery, *Timebomb*, for MGM (produced by Rafaella De Laurentiis) and the supernatural mystery, *Doppelganger*, starring Drew Barrymore, for 20th Century Fox. Both films won prizes at the Avoriaz Science Fiction and Fantasy Festival in France. The success of *Doppelganger* created an alliance between Neshet and Buena Vista International, which led to the production of several tongue-in-cheek genre movies, most of which premiered on the HBO network. Neshet's next theatrical offering, *The Taxman*, which he wrote, produced and directed, opened to critical acclaim. The New York Times called it, "A delight . . . a charmer of a mystery."

In 2001, Neshet returned to Israel to write and direct *Turn Left at the End of the World*, which was released in 2004. The film, which tells the story of two teenage girls growing up in an isolated Negev town, became Israel's biggest box-office success. In 2010, it was included on the Jerusalem Post's list of the 10 best Israeli films of the past decade. Later in 2004, Neshet's experimental political documentary, *Oriental*, won the "In the Spirit of Freedom" Award at the Jerusalem Film Festival.

Neshet's next film, *The Secrets* (2007), about young ultra-Orthodox women who meet a mysterious Frenchwoman, played by Fanny Ardant, premiered as an official selection at the Toronto International Film Festival. It was hailed by *The Hollywood Reporter* as, "Witty and wise, sensual and emotionally over-powering – one of the best Israeli movies in recent years." New York Observer critic Andrew Sarris called it, "One of the best movies of the year." Later that year, Neshet received the Cinematic Excellence Award from the Jerusalem Film Festival, and in 2009 received an award for his life's work from the Haifa International Film Festival.

Neshet's latest film, *The Matchmaker*, inspired by Amir Gutfreund's novel, *When Heroes Fly*, was produced by David Silber, Moshe Edery, Leon Edery and Chilik Michaeli. Set in Haifa in 1968, it tells the story of an Israeli teenage boy who gets a

summer job working for a Holocaust survivor who runs a matchmaking service. The movie has received wide critical acclaim and popular success.

MICHELE ABRAMOWICZ (Director of Photography) – Born in France, Abramowicz started his career as an assistant director on commercials. He has also shot many music videos, including Madonna's *American Life*. He has filmed many movies for Luc Besson, the most recent of which was *From Paris with Love*. He has been the cinematographer on many other films, among them *April Captains* and *Empire of the Wolves*. Most recently he shot the remake of "the Thing" for Universal. Previously, he worked with Avi Neshet as an assistant cinematographer on *Dizengoff 99* and as cinematographer on *The Secrets*.

PHILIPPE SARDE (Composer, Original Score) – Sarde, one of the most important film composers of the last 40 years, has written scores for movies by such directors as Roman Polanski (*Tess*, *The Tenant*) and Claude Sautet (*Nelly & Monsieur Arnaud*). In 1988, he served on the jury at the Cannes Film Festival. His score for *The Matchmaker* marks the first time he has composed the music for an Israeli film, but he wrote the score for Israeli director Moshe Mizrahi's Oscar-winning French movie, *Madame Rosa* (1977).

ISAAC SEHAYEK (Editor) – Sehayek is one of the most acclaimed editors in Israel. He has worked with Avi Neshet since the beginning of his career. He spent several years living in Los Angeles, where he worked as an editor and a movie critic. Sehayek has edited Neshet's *The Troupe*, *Dizengoff 99*, *Timebomb*, *Turn Left at the End of the World* and *The Secrets*, as well as the films *Lost Islands*, *Sweet Mud*, and *Ushpizin*.

Critical Acclaim for **THE MATCHMAKER**

**** “Avi Nesher is Israel's greatest filmmaker, and this is one of his best films.”

Yair Raveh, Cinemascope

**** “Moving, stylish, and intelligent – Adir Miller and Maya Dagan are excellent. Highly recommended.”

Yehuda Stav, Yedioth Ahronoth

**** “Avi Nesher’s latest movie is an immensely pleasurable and moving film that creates a portrait of Israel in 1968 that sheds light on the country today, and does so without sacrificing drama to polemics. . . One of the most rewarding Israeli films in years.”

Hannah Brown, Jerusalem Post

**** “Not to be missed. An extraordinary movie by the incomparable Avi Nesher.”

Albert Gabai, Channel One

***** “A moving and sensitive cinematic symphony from the Master Avi Nesher.”

Nahum Mochiah, Makor Rishon

**** Unforgettable Celebration of Cinema Magic – breathtakingly moving – Adir Miller's performance is extraordinary.”

Pablo Autin, Israel Today

**** "Romantic, Nostalgic and magical – a moving cinematic experience...”

Anat Bar-Lev Efrati, Women Weekly

The True Story of the Romanian Dwarves in **THE MATCHMAKER**

There actually was a movie theater in Haifa run by a family of Romanian dwarves who survived Auschwitz. The Ovitzes were a Jewish family in Maramaros County, Romania. They had 10 children, seven of whom were dwarves. The children founded a performing ensemble, the Lilliput Troupe, in the 1930s. They sang and played instruments in Romanian, Yiddish, Hungarian, Russian and German, while their taller relatives helped backstage.

In 1944, all members of the family were deported to Auschwitz. They immediately attracted the attention of Dr. Mengele, who was fascinated by them. He moved all seven dwarves and their relatives to special living quarters that were called his “human zoo.” Although the experiments he performed on them were cruel and humiliating, the dwarves survived until the end of the war.

They returned to their village in Romania, but in 1949 emigrated to Israel. They put their troupe back together and began performing. Their act was such a success that they earned enough money to buy a movie theater.

You can read more about them in the book, *In Our Hearts We Were Giants: The Remarkable Story of the Lilliput Troupe—A Dwarf Family's Survival of the Holocaust* by Yehuda Koren and Eilat Negev, published by Carroll & Graf. In addition, there is a Wikipedia entry about the Ovitz family, at <http://horinca.blogspot.com/2006/11/dwarf-jewish-theater-of-maramures.html>

There is also information about them on the blog Dumneazu, at <http://horinca.blogspot.com/2006/11/dwarf-jewish-theater-of-maramures.html>

THE MATCHMAKER A FILM BY **AVI NESHER**

Credits

YANKELE BRIDE: ADIR MILLER
CLARA EPSTEIN: MAYA DAGAN
MEIR THE LIBRARIAN: DROR KEREN
YOZI BURSTEIN: DOV NAVON
ARIK BURSTEIN: TUVAL SHAFIR
TAMARA: NETA PORAT
NILI BURSTEIN: YARDEN BAR-KOCHVA
SYLVIA: BAT-EL PAPURA
MOSHE ABADI: KOBI FARAG
TIKVA ABADI: Yael LEVENTHAL
BENI ABADI: TOM GAL
ARIK BURSTEIN - ADULT: EYAL SHECHTER
GUEST STARRING ELI JASPAN AS **UNCLE NADGI**

PRODUCERS: MOSHE EDERY, LEON EDERY, AVRAHAM PIRCHI, DAVID SILBER
CHILIK MICHAELI, AVI NESHER, TAMI LEON, NATAN CASPI.
CO-PRODUCERS SHLOMO MOGRABI - RAMI DAMRI - EVIATAR DOTAN
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY: MICHELE ABRAMOWICZ A.F.C.
EDITOR : ISAAC SEHAYEK
ART DESIGNER MIGUEL MARKIN
COSTUME DESIGNER RONA DORON
MAKE UP ETI BEN-NUN **SPECIAL MAKE UP** LIAT SHEININ
SOUND MIXER DAVID LISS
SOUND DESIGNER YISRAEL DAVID
ORIGINAL SCORE PHILIPPE SARDE

WRITTEN BY AVI NESHER
INSPIRED BY AMIR GUTFREUND'S NOVEL "WHEN HEROES FLY"

PRODUCED BY METRO COMMUNICATONS, UNITED CHANNELS MOVIES - UCM &
ARTOMAS COMMUNICATIONS

PRODUCED IN ASSOCIATION WITH KESHET - HOT - PRAXIS

SUPPORTED BY THE YEHOSHUA RABINOVICH TEL-AVIV FOUNDATION FOR THE
ARTS- CINEMA PROJECT.

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Posted: Thurs., Sep. 16, 2010, 11:21am PT

The Matchmaker

(Israel) A 6Sales presentation of a United King Films, Metro Communications, United Channel Movies, Artomas Communications production in association with Keshey, Hot, Praxis and the participation of the Yeshoua Rabinovich Tel Aviv Foundation for the Arts and Cinema Project (International sales: 6Sales, Toronto.) Produced by Moshe Ederi, Leon Edery, David Silber, Avraham Pirchi, David Silber, Chilik Michaeli, Avi Neshet, Tami Leon, Natan Caspi. Co-producers, Shlomo Mograbi, Rami Damri, Eviatar Dotan. Directed, written by Avi Neshet, inspired by Amir Gutfreund's novel "When Heroes Fly." With: Adir Miller, Maya Dagan, Dror Keren, Dov Navon, Tuval Shafir, Neta Porat, Yarden Bar-Kochva, Bat-el Papura, Kobi Farag, Yael Leventhal, Tom Gal, Eyal Shechter.

By JOHN ANDERSON

A memory play gold-dusted with adolescent longing and a strong sense of fable, "The Matchmaker" seems singular among Israeli features in the way it juxtaposes guilt with hope, national birth pains with youthful hubris, and utilizes an underside of Israeli life not usually exposed to public view. Nevertheless, this look back at late-'60s Haifa makes for strong, accessible, character-driven drama. Theatrical exposure will be limited to arthouses, but festival play should be strong and DVD sales vibrant.

Opening in 2006 Haifa, with the sky raining Lebanese missiles, "Matchmaker" finds the 50-ish writer Arik Burstein (Eyal Shechter) receiving a windfall: Yankele Bride (Israeli standup comic Adir Miller), the matchmaker for whom Arik worked as a teenager, has left him money and property in his will. The unexpected, life-transforming inheritance whisks Arik back into the past, to Haifa of 1968 -- a changing world that includes his parents, who've seen enough change in their life, and Yankele, a Romanian camp survivor who is introduced to Arik at a pivotal moment of his youth.

Based on Amir Gutfreund's book "When Heroes Fly," "The Matchmaker" has a novelistic traffic jam of plotlines; Yankele works out of the "bad side" of Haifa, where women of ill repute, smugglers and vagabonds inhabit the street. Helmer Avi Neshet creates a sense of Fellini-esque carnival, made only more striking by the presence of the diminutive Sylvia (the beautiful Bat-el Papura) and her family of dwarves, who run the local movie house. Sylvia is one of Yankele's more problematic clients, but he's not discouraged, being convinced that he can provide people "what they need, not what they want."

The ad-hoc alliance of young Arik (Tuval Shafir) and Yankele is believable and poignant: Arik is the bright future of Israel, whereas Yankele is its past -- viewed as shameful by many Israeli, who believe if you survived the Holocaust, you must have done something wrong. This becomes the film's most intriguing aspect: Did Yankele do something he's ashamed of? What about Clara (Maya Dagan), whom Yankele, the

matchmaker, can love only at arm's length? "The Matchmaker's" most exhilaratingly pathetic moment arrives when Yankele relates to Arik a camp story that ought to curl his hair: Is it really about Yankele and Clara? We never know, but the possibility is haunting.

Miller is superb, as is Dagan, whose Clara is a broken sparrow, lost in her sorrows. Running concurrently with their tale is Arik's story, which is a far more pedestrian tale of raging adolescence. When the disturbing Tamara (Neta Porat) is dropped off with relatives for the summer, in the hopes of straightening out her disruptive behavior, the teenage city of Haifa is suddenly introduced to the '60s; Tamara is like an Israeli version of Courtney Love, upending propriety and getting several boys, including Arik, in touch with their burgeoning libidos.

The film's equilibrium, counterbalancing Arik's confused teenage joy and Yankele's melancholia, is a metaphor all its own, and is well handled by Nesher. What "The Matchmaker" lacks is a similar sense of calibration with regard to performances; the younger characters come across as far less convincing than their elders. But perhaps that's a metaphor, too.

Production values are topnotch.

Camera (color), Michele Abramowicz; editor, Isaac Sehayek; music, Philippe Sarde; art director, Miguel Markin; costume designer, Rona Doron; sound, Yisrael David.

Reviewed at Toronto Film Festival (Contemporary World Cinema), Sept. 11, 2010.

Running time: 110 MIN.

Read the full article at:

<http://www.variety.com/story.asp?l=story&r=VE1117943578&c=31>

Make Me A Match

Avi Neshet Sells Out at the Toronto International Film Festival



Client and Scout: Sylvia (Bat-El Papura) and Arik (Tuval Shafir) talk business in the street.

By Ron Dicker

Published September 20, 2010, issue of [October 01, 2010](#).

Shortly after the North American press premiere of “The Matchmaker” hit technical difficulties and screened without English subtitles, the film’s Israeli director, Avi Neshet, tried to calm himself. “Wrist-slashing is an option,” he said.

About 100 journalists and industry types showed up for the recent Toronto International Film Festival screening, and dwindled to a handful within minutes.

“The most interesting part of making movies is when what you did finally meets the people, whether they are in Tel Aviv or Toronto,” Neshet said. “It’s crushing that it didn’t happen.”

When the technical gods do not interfere, Neshet’s works usually connect. He is one of Israel’s most popular directors, boasting a string of homegrown hits. His 2004 film about a girl from India adjusting to life in the Negev, “Turn Left at the End of the World,” sold more than 600,000 tickets, according to The Jerusalem Post. That’s big box office in a country of fewer than 8 million people.

Neshet estimated that his average budget was about \$2 million, and he says that all his films have made money — just not the crazy money that he could be making in Hollywood, where he toiled for 10 years as a writer-director of such B-feature titles as “Timebomb” (1991) and “Doppelganger” (1993), the latter featuring Drew Barrymore.

He still gets offers. He turns them down. A recent jog he took on a Tel Aviv beach perhaps explains why: Eight or nine people approached him to say how much “The Matchmaker” had moved them. “It’s very joyous to make these movies that have a part in your country’s cultural life,” he said.

“The Matchmaker” takes place in the summer of 1968. Israel has settled into the everyday after a 20-year struggle to survive, capped by victory in the 1967 Six Day War. An imposing matchmaker, Yankele (Adir Miller), works what he calls “special cases,” meaning the scarred, freakish and lovelorn who occupy the lower city of Haifa. One favorite client is Sylvia (Bat-El Papura), a dwarf who runs a movie house that screens only love stories; however, she yearns for a romance of her own.

The film casts a nonjudgmental gaze. An elegant mystery woman (Maya Dagan) hosts gambling parties, where booze and conversation flow freely. Prostitutes strut along the streets.

Much of the action is filtered through the eyes of the teenage Arik (Tuval Shafir), who scouts prospects for the matchmaker. For Arik, America’s 1967 Summer of Love arrives in Israel a year later, in the form of Tamara (Neta Porat), who has returned from the United States blaring rock ‘n’ roll and talking of free love.

“I’ve lived in Israel many years, and it’s like any other country,” Neshet said. “It’s about having fun. It’s about surviving. It’s about where your next meal comes from. It’s about who you fall in love with. It has big historical events as the wind to its sails, but the way life is conducted is ordinary.”

Neshet blasts the notion that he is tough to pin down thematically. He explained that all his films tackle Israeli mythology through key subjects: immigration (in 2004’s “Turn Left at the End of the World”), religion (2007’s “The Secrets”) and freedom fighters (1984’s “Rage and Glory”). Even his first movie, a 1979 musical called “The Troupe,” examined the Israeli ideal of the collective, he said.

“The Matchmaker” quietly evokes the Holocaust. All the characters have been touched by this massive tragedy. Some, like Yankele, bear obvious physical evidence. Neshet’s own parents were survivors, and his mother did not speak of the experience until two years ago, he said. And even then, she talked to Neshet’s children, now 13 and 9, not to Neshet himself.

“The Holocaust is so deeply embedded in the national consciousness,” he said. “You consider yourself an outcast — being a child of parents who are Holocaust survivors. It is an overriding experience and emotion, so you become sympathetic to everything outcast and very open to it.”

The misfits of “The Matchmaker” — titled “Once I Was” (“*Pa’am ha’yi’i*”) in Israel — yearn to squeeze the most out of the daily routine, no matter how horrible the past. (The dwarves running the movie house are rooted in historical fact: A similar family endured Dr. Mengele’s gruesome experiments before immigrating to Haifa.)

“It’s about accepting people who are not like us,” said Neshet, who borrowed elements of Amir Gutfreund’s 2008 book “When Heroes Fly” and collaborated with the author on the script. “These are people that I know, people I relate to.”

“The Matchmaker” earned seven nominations for Israel’s version of the Academy Awards, providing further validation that Neshet made the right move in choosing projects of passion over stateside thrillers. A native of Israel who lived for years in New York City as a student at the Ramaz yeshiva and Columbia University, Neshet said he considered his adventures in Hollywood an exercise in making movies from the head.

Now that Neshet makes movies from the heart, he believes there is no formula to undermine their soul.

“There’s no particularly happy ending, and George Clooney is nowhere in sight,” he said.

On a happy note to Neshet’s bittersweet movie, the rest of the screenings in Toronto unspooled with the subtitles intact, the film’s publicist said. All the public showings were sold out, reinforcing an exchange I had with Neshet about film fans not having to be Jewish to enjoy his work.

Said the filmmaker, “Apparently the word is out.”

Ron Dicker is a freelance writer based in New York who writes regularly for the Forward.

Read more: <http://www.forward.com/articles/131430/#ixzz11QUIaD5V>