

Violence and death in the Middle East But love and laughter, too

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Israel is never out of the news, and most of it isn't good: war, terrorism, intifadas, religious fanaticism, government scandal. All fine fodder for journalists, of course, but filmmakers have found ready-made inspiration there, too.

Now is a good time to watch the best on DVD: Monday is Yom Hazikaron (Memorial Day, commemorating the death of Israeli soldiers and civilian victims of Palestinian violence) and Tuesday is Yom Ha'atzmaut (Independence Day, marking the end of British rule of Palestine in 1948).

Here are five contemporary films out of Israel and the Palestinian territories. People on both sides of the struggle can watch and learn.

Death in Gaza (*England, 2004*) This documentary cost British cameraman James Miller his life. Making a movie about the life and death of Palestinian children in the Gaza Strip in the spring of 2003, he was shot and killed in a burst of gunfire from an Israeli army night-time patrol in Rafah, a southern frontier town. It's all there on tape. Harrowing stuff.

Paradise Now (*Palestine/ France/Germany/Netherlands/Israel, 2005*) Oscar-nominated, this thriller is about two young Palestinians from Nablus who are recruited for a suicide bombing in Tel Aviv. The film was criticized by Israeli hawks for humanizing terrorists, and by radical Palestinians for revealing the tricks of their trade. It's directed by a Palestinian who lives in Israel and filmed under duress in the West Bank and Israel.

Ushpizin (*Israel, 2004*) A gentle comedy of manners about the closed world of ultraorthodox Haredi Jews in Israel, this film focuses on a married couple as they prepare for the autumn festival, Sukkoth, and find themselves saddled with two unwanted guests (in Hebrew, "ushpizin"). God and lemons figure highly. Enjoy.



The Syrian Bride (*Israel/France/ Germany, 2004*) This family drama of a Druze bride in a remote corner of the Golan Heights won a rack of prizes at the 2004

Montreal World Film Festival, including the big one, the Grand prix des Amériques. It's a tale of absurdity, as much about how borders keep people in as about how they keep peoples apart.

Walk on Water (*Israel/Sweden, 2004*) A Mossad agent (hunky star Lior Ashkenazi) befriends a pair of German tourists to get to their grandfather, a Nazi war criminal alive and not so well and living in Germany. Fast-paced, nice to look at and highly entertaining, there are plot reversals aplenty in director Eytan Fox's third feature.

Also worth seeing (on the big screen): **The Darien Dilemma** (*Israel, 2006*) Mixing documentary and fiction, the Israeli father-and-son team of Nachum and Erez Laufer tell the true story of a boatload of 1,000 Viennese refugees stranded on the Danube River in the winter of 1941, trying to get to Palestine. The film will be screened by the director himself at the Montreal Goethe Institut (418 Sherbrooke St. E.) on May 7 at 7:30 p.m.

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