

'Fish Out of Water' is charming

By Jan Lisa Huttner

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"Like a Fish Out of Water" is a charming 50-minute film about a widower named "Marcello" who has recently made aliyah with his young daughter Lucy. Once a well-known soap opera actor in Argentina, Marcello must now start again from scratch. Eager to audition for a new role, Marcello convinces his ulpan teacher, Anat, to rehearse with him after class. One thing leads to another, and much to her own surprise, the buttoned-down beautiful, sabra from a religious family finds herself falling for the high-spirited newcomer.

Esteban Gottfried, who was born in Argentina and immigrated to Israel as a teenager, plays Marcello. Well-established in Israel's theatre scene, he is best known for "The Revenge of Itzik Finkelstein" (starring Moshe Ivgy), which brought him two Ophir Awards from the Israel Film Academy (for Best Supporting Actor and Best Screenplay) in 1993.

"Fish" was directed by Leon (Leonid) Prudovsky who emigrated from Russia as a teenager himself, so the feeling of dislocation and thwarted expectations, while comic, is very sharp. American audiences will have to make an extra effort to listen with their hearts, because a lot of the humor comes from the mix of accents. Not to worry: the storyline is so linear that attending to the details is easy.

Tal Lifshitz is lovely in the role of Anat, and Fira Kantor is broadly comic as her intrusive mother. The wonderful voice Marcello and Anat listen to on their first inadvertent date belongs to Cantor Udi Spielman. Daughter Lucy is played by young Dana Raiter, and the ubiquitous Vladimir Friedman (who played key supporting roles in "Broken Wings" and "The Schwartz Dynasty"), appears here as Marcello's Russian buddy "Chekhov."

"Fish" has won numerous audience awards at film festivals all around the world including Beijing, Bucharest, and Venice as well as Jerusalem, New York, and St. Petersburg.

"Like a Fish Out of Water" will screen at the Hartford Jewish Film Festival on Wednesday, March 14, 1 p.m., at the Mandell JCC, 335 Bloomfield Ave., in West Hartford. It follows two short films.

Jan Lisa Huttner is arts & culture critic for Chicago's JUF News.

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