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Actor
Beaufort: American-born Filmmaker Finds His Historical Moment
By Jan Lisa Huttner

Joseph Cedar’s new film Beaufort, set during the Israel Defense Force’s withdrawal from southern Lebanon in 2000, is Israel’s candidate for this year’s “Best Foreign Language Film” Oscar. The Academy Awards’ ceremony will be history by the time you read this article, but win or lose, I believe images from Beaufort will endure long after most films released in 2007 have faded from memory. Beaufort is more that just a milestone in Israeli filmmaking, it’s one of the most significant combat films ever made.

dge both who he is and what he does “in our name.”

Many highly-praised directors tried to say something meaningful about “the war on terrorism” in 2007, but they all fell short. Consider Paul Haggis’s In the Valley of Elah and Peter Berg’s The Kingdom, Robert Redford’s Lions for Lambs, Brian de Palma’s Redacted and Gavin Hood’s Rendition; not one was a critical or commercial success. Only Beaufort helps us understand things we really need to know.

Based on Ron Leshem’s novel, Im Yesh Gan Eden, which won Israel’s top literary award, the Sapir Prize, in 2006, Beaufort is not an overly political film in any way. I think calling it “an anti-war film”, as other critics have suggested, is incorrect. Beaufort is about the last members of the IDF to occupy Beaufort Castle in southern Lebanon. Should these particular soldiers (Continued on Page 15)

Timing is Everything

Whereas Cedar’s earlier works, Time of Favor and Campfire, reached the United States when they were out of synch with events here, Beaufort arrives in the United States at the perfect time. With American soldiers bogged down in the Iraqi quagmire, we are very much attuned to the citizen-soldier; and we must acknow-
family is obviously much wealthier and better connected. But non-Israeli audiences, even Jewish-Americans who are relatively familiar with Israel’s unique cultural stew, will have to listen carefully to catch all of this.

Liraz is played by Oshri Cohen, best-known to American audiences as the teenage hero in Bonjour Monseur Shlomi. He also played an important supporting role, that of Rafi, in Campfire. For those of us who have watched Cohen grow from Shlomi to Campfire to Beaufort, his performance is a fulfillment of early promise. He has grown from an adorable boy into a young mensch. The long, tight close-up of his face at the very end of Beaufort totally broke my heart, even when I watched the film for a third time.

A well-respected filmmaker

Cedar, who was born in New York in 1986 and moved to Jerusalem at the age of six, is one of Israel’s most respected young directors. His first film Time of Favor (Ha Hesder) was nominated for eleven awards by the Israel Film Academy in 2000, and won five including Best Film, Best Director, and Best Screenplay. His second film, Campfire (Medurat Hashevet), released in 2004, was nominated for thirteen IFA awards and also received five (once again including Best Film, Best Director, and Best Screenplay). Beaufort was nominated for the Golden Bear and won the Silver Bear at the Berlin International Film Festival last February and went on to receive ten nominations and four awards from the Israel Film Academy in September.

Watching Beaufort fills us with empathy for specific soldiers, yes, but it creates personal anxiety as well. Combat films used to be about battles, but there aren’t many battles per se in “the war on terrorism.” On 9/11 ordinary Americans experienced the fear that comes of being the unwitting object of fanatical hatred. But Israelis have been living with this rage for generations, and Cedar has found revelatory ways to depict the world in which we all now live. “Incoming! Incoming! Impact! Impact!” It’s not just “out there” anymore.

Jan Lisa Huttner (Tziviah bat Yisroel v’Hudah) is the author of Tzivi’s Spotlight, a Jewish culture column published every month in Chicago’s JUF News. Send comments to Tzivi@msn.com.