

Israeli Directorial Debut ‘The Band’s Visit’ Built on Series of Bittersweet, Exquisite Moments

Submitted by [HollywoodChicago.com](http://www.hollywoodchicago.com) [1] on March 18, 2008 - 11:05pm

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CHICAGO – When we speak of conflicts between people or ideologies, there’s a tendency for broad categorization. Who are the liberals or the conservatives? What type of people make up the Israelis or Palestinians? Who are the people of color and who are white?



These lines are becoming blurred, and underneath it all, it boils down to familiar humanity. Who’s going to reach out to demonstrate that? Perhaps writer and director Eran Kolirin in his brilliant Israeli film debut “The Band’s Visit”.

The story centers around a band of Egyptian police musicians in absurd matching blue uniforms anchored by longtime conductor Tawfiq (Sasson Gabai). When they are invited to the opening of an Arab center in Israel, an errant bus ride from the airport gets them lost in a small desert town.

An inconsequential diner becomes their refuge where owner Dina (Ronit Elkabetz) and her patrons offer overnight accommodations until transportation arrives in the morning. The subsequent interaction between these native dwellers and the alien musicians divulges moments of true affirmation.



The film is built on a series of these “moments” that – much like the notes and silences in a symphony – expose the truth in the characters. Dina’s frustration in being stuck in the small town is filtered through Tawfiq’s tortured dignity.

The band’s resident ladies’ man, Haled, gives love lessons to a hapless would-be Romeo named Papi.

In a slight but poignant aside, a musician dreams of being a composer and playing an unfinished concerto that has no ending. It is a symbolic tribute to dreams lost in the real time.

Writer and director Kolirin addresses the Israeli and Arab fray by reducing the conflict to individuals struggling daily with their past and present conditions. In essence, these people want to do the right thing for themselves and others.



“The Band’s Visit”.
Photo credit: IMDb

The setting within the small town – like the tawdry restaurant and the dilapidated roller-skating rink – reduces the issue of territory down to a place nobody really wants to be.

Kolirin’s use of medium shots encompassing several characters at a time creates an atmosphere of equality that stresses the commonality of life rather than the differences of tribalism.

We see bittersweet and beautiful emotions running throughout the film. These are spread from the small victories in human connection – where a kind word or action can produce a momentary peace from the pressures of life – to the shared passion that the language of music conjures up.

Through this amazing and simple story it is the power of forgiveness – of others and especially of self – that provides hope for moving forward in the journey always with the essential soundtrack drifting in the background. And the band plays on...

“The Band’s Visit” opened at Landmark’s Century Center Cinema in Chicago and Landmark’s Renaissance in Highland Park, Ill. on March 7, 2008.

[Click here for our full “The Band’s Visit” image gallery!](#) [8]



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