

Focus on Film

Foxtrot

Drama
Israel

Tuesday, May 14, 2019 @ 7:00 p.m.

Director: *Samuel Maoz, 2017 Israel*

Running time: *113 minutes, Hebrew with English subtitles*

Almost every Israeli has either lost a loved one to military action or terrorist attack, or has friends or relatives that have suffered such a loss. Israelis carry on their daily routines, however, with only a subliminal recognition of this situation. In *Foxtrot*, Samuel Maoz explores the underlying tension in Israeli society created by living a precarious existence in a state that was created to insulate Jews from the perils they have faced for centuries. He tells his story in three parts, each with its own shocking twists of fate.

The film starts with the scene every Israeli family dreads. The doorbell of the Feldman apartment rings and three soldiers are standing at the door. Nobody has to tell Dafna what they are there for. She faints dead away, and with practiced skill the visitors inject her with tranquilizers while she convulses on the floor. As the soldiers tell Michael (Lior Ashkenazi, never better) that their son Jonathan has been killed in the line of duty, he stands mute and paralyzed, his shock and grief registering on face and in his eyes. The practiced efficiency of the soldiers as they take him through the many steps that will follow creates a nightmare atmosphere with strong elements of the absurd. They make him drink water and set an alarm on his phone to remind him every hour to drink, when it's clear that hydration is the last thing on his mind.

Just when the nightmare has gone on long enough for Michael (and the audience) to near

the breaking point, a sudden shocking twist sends us to the second part of the film in which the son Jonathon is serving with three other young men at a checkpoint in the middle of the desert. It's a surrealistic scene, where the boys raise the bar for the occasional lone camel, or check the papers of the few Palestinians passing by on their way to a wedding or on an errand. At night they go home to a shipping container that is sinking into the mud on a tilt, eat the Israeli equivalent of Spam and play video games. Jonathon turns out to be a nice boy with real artistic talent, who tells a funny-sad story about how his father, as a boy, became enamored of a pin-up model in a girlie magazine and bartered a family heirloom for it. But another stunning twist sends us to the third part of the movie, in which a year later, Jonathon's parents face their grief and the possibility of reconciliation with their fate and with one another.

In *Foxtrot*, Maoz constantly keeps us off balance with plot twists, and with photography that adds to a feeling of disorientation—overhead shots, dizzying views of geometric tiles, and the claustrophobic feel of the powder room to which the Feldmans retreat from their spacious apartment when they want to feel their grief. And though the three parts of the film may seem disjointed at first, the continuing themes and parallel incidents tie the movie up into a satisfying whole by the time it concludes.

Reviewed by Sheldon Leemon

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