



מעלה בית הספר לטלוויזיה
לקולנוע ולאמנויות, ירושלים
The Ma'aleh School of Television,
Film & the Arts, Jerusalem

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מה רודף סאל'ר SHELL



Shell-shocked, via student movies

By BARRY DAVIS

The more we are exposed to the horrors of war and terrorism, on TV news and online, the more we tend to become inured to the emotional fallout of violence, unless, of course, we are unfortunate enough to be directly involved.

One of several salient points made by Hagai Adorian in his moving documentary *Shell* is that anyone who takes part in a military confrontation comes out of it with some psychological baggage to contend with.

The original Hebrew name of the film translates literally as "What Chases A Staff Sergeant," although translating the name into English is a bit of a pointless exercise, as we discover in one of the later scenes. The Hebrew title is *Ma Rodef Samar*, the staff sergeant in question being Ariel Ben-Meir, a friend of the filmmaker and, like Adorian, a combat medic. Both served in Operation Protective Edge in summer 2014.

Shell is one of a crop of impressive movies made by students of the Ma'aleh School of Television, Film & the Arts in Musrara. Half a dozen works of third- and fourth-year students will feature in the final project screening event which takes place annually at the Jerusalem Cinematheque. This year's batch will be on view on January 21 (5 p.m.).

The full roster takes in a wide range of subject matter, viewpoints and sensibilities, including *Cold Water*, by Tehila Dansker, about a young woman who is estranged from her father after he becomes ultra-Orthodox, and who discovers he has remarried and has a new family. Michal Pinsky's *Factory of Dreams* takes us into the realms of fantasy, while Hadas Yona's *Breath* ventures into the treacherous waters of sexual exploitation.

Religion, along with social religious mores, are front and center in Shira Gabai's captivating and entertaining *The Gravedigger's Daughter*, while *Biography*, by Arik Kaufman, is a dark offering that touches on neighborly shenanigans and how survivors of victims of war deal with their loss.

Shell is a lyrical work that, says Adorian, represents a challenging departure for him from his usual approach.

"I generally go for action-packed films," he says. "I like faster-moving movies, with faster music. *Shell* is a much slower affair. In that respect it was something of a challenge."

It was also a means of working through some of the emotional detritus both he and Ben-Meir have accumulated over the years of their military service and active duty in various IDF operations in Gaza.

Ben-Meir is Adorian's junior by a couple of years, and he slotted into the director's position in the same IDF unit. Sadly, their com-



'Shell': A still and the promotional poster.
(Photos: Courtesy)

mon ground also takes in the loss of a friend and brother in arms, Daniel Marsh, who was killed during Operation Protective Edge.

"There is a lot of the spirit of Marsh in the film," explains Adorian. "I wanted to know how he died and what exactly happened there [where the mortar fell]. I had heard all sorts of accounts of the event, but it was only when I got together with Ariel and actually went to the site that I really got what happened."

Shell is something of a fusion of a travelogue and an emotive documentary account of a tragic event. After being released by the army, after the campaign in Gaza, Ben-Meir hit the road, moving up and down the country's highways and byways, pointing his car in any which direction on a whim.

I remark to Adorian that that go-with-the-flow mind-set is reminiscent, albeit on a much more limited mileage scale, of the spirit of Jack Kerouac's counterculture account of his crisscrossing of the United States *On the Road*. "That's funny," says Adorian. "I was originally thinking of calling my film 'On the Road'!"

Shell is not specifically about Ben-Meir's seemingly aimless to-ing and fro-ing, but about working through his wartime experiences.

"I wanted to develop the sense of Ariel as someone who is a bit lost in what he went through, as someone searching for inner peace," Adorian says.

The same could be said for the director. "We are both dealing with what happened, in our individual way," he says. "Ariel has his car and I have my camera. Working with a camera and making a film is also some kind of therapy."

Adorian is now in his fourth and final year at Ma'aleh, and has accrued a decent amount of filmic experience, including having a previous film, *11 Minutes*, screened at the Peace on Earth Film Festival in Chicago.

He had the technical skills to edit *Shell* - he edited *The Undertak-*



The film is not about Ben-Meir's seemingly aimless travels, but about working through his wartime experiences. (Courtesy)



Filmmaker Hagai Adorian: 'Shell' is a lyrical work representing a departure from his usual action-packed approach. (Michal From)

er's Daughter for classmate Gabai - but felt he needed to bring in someone from the outside, with less of an emotional attachment with the subject matter. The result is a gently flowing retelling of Ben-Meir and Adorian's forays around the country, although not in the chronological order in which they actually happened.

Adorian says he didn't really know what he was letting himself in for and, in fact, had only one thing clear in his mind ahead of time. "When I started I didn't really know what I was looking for or what I wanted to get out of the film. The only thing I was sure about was that we had to go to the place where Marsh and the others were killed." All told, five soldiers lost their lives in the mortar attack. "After that I said let's just run with it, and we'll see where we end up."

One of the most appealing aspects of *Shell* is that, heart-on-sleeve revelations notwithstanding, Ben-Meir clearly feels comfortable - as comfortable as he possibly could - talking about such a painful event with Adorian. It is patently obvious that the interviewee feels the interviewer knows exactly where he's coming from. This is not a documentary whereby a filmmaker sets out to rummage through someone's emotions - as empathetic as he or she may be to the subject's predicament - in search of a gripping story, however tastefully it is proffered for public consumption.

Even so, Ben-Meir required some gentle encouragement to agree to spill his personal beans for the camera.

"I deliberated about what to shoot," says Adorian, "and Ariel said: 'Don't worry, as soon as I get into the car, there won't be a dull moment.' In fact, there were lots of interesting and colorful characters we met along the way, who didn't make it into the final edited version. That's what happens when you set off on a journey. You always have surprising encounters."

Adorian duly loosened his grip on the rudder and let the documentary, and the story line, unfurl organically. That eventually drew him into the thick of the evolving plot, as he and Ben-Meir talk about how they each cope with the personal aftermath of the military campaign.

"That wasn't planned at all," says Adorian. "I realized that was what I wanted to convey here, that Ariel is not an individual person, he is part of a trend. There are plenty of others, like us, who have been through the mill in the army. Ariel dealt with it by driving around in his car, others go to work and taking their scars with them through their work day, and then back home."

"We all have our stuff to deal with."

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