



Note from Roger Durling

Description

Dear Cinephiles,

L'Shana Tova! This week we're featuring SAND STORM – Israel's official submission to this past year's Academy Award. The film takes place in a Bedouin village in Southern Israel – and it's rich in cultural specifics. But it's themes are so universal. It gives a powerful – clear-eyed look at the inequalities facing women in that part of the world.

Below is a review from Variety. It plays tonight at 5:00pm and tomorrow at 7:30pm at the Riviera Theatre.

[Get tickets here!](#)

See you at the movies!
Roger Durling



A sympathetic but clear-eyed look at the inequalities that entrap women (and the men they love and resent) in a Bedouin village.

By Ella Taylor – Variety

On the face of it, “Sand Storm” presents a familiar feminist tale of a teenaged girl trapped between her desire to control her destiny and the constraints of her traditional family. Yet this emotionally intelligent first feature offers a sympathetic but clear-eyed look at the tangled skein of inequalities that entrap women (and the men they love and resent) in a Bedouin village stranded between modernization and anachronistic patriarchy. Written and directed by a Jewish Israeli woman, Elite Zexer, and made with a Jewish-Arab crew, the film boasts alluring desert visuals, muscular acting and intricate psychology that should attract audiences for women’s movies, foreign art films and those who believe that melodrama still has a place in cinema.

Men are not permitted at a Bedouin celebration in Southern Israel to welcome (with variable enthusiasm) the arrival of a second wife. Instead the older women wear fake mustaches, one of many striking images in “Sand Storm” that address the crucible of anger and pain that simmers beneath the revelry. Jalila (Ruba Blal-Asfour), the man’s first wife, glowers magnificently, and not just because she’s going to have to share power with the younger newcomer. Discovering that her daughter, Layla (Lamis Ammar), has a secret lover at school, Jalila freaks out at first, then defends Layla to her father, Suliman (Haitham Omari), who has given his eldest child many modern advantages — a cell phone, driving lessons, an education — and yet, for his own murky reasons, shows willing to sacrifice her future to an arranged marriage to a village man she barely knows.

At once autocratic and weak, Suliman props up an archaic social structure in which men call the shots but women clean up the messes. Ammar makes a charmingly frisky Layla, but the energy of “Sand Storm” surely belongs to Blal-Asfour as her mother, a caged tiger who smolders and paces and deliver tongue-lashings to her hapless conformist of a husband as needed. Rail as they might, Jalila and Layla remain caught between loyalty to their disintegrating family and an emerging hunger for autonomy and

experience that are prohibited by their medieval fate. Those fake mustaches signal both strength and vulnerability, and the movie captures the stark beauty of the Negev desert where this traditionally nomadic tribe has put down roots, marred by a pervasive sense of entrapment for the young woman who's both deeply attached to her mother and sisters, and desperate to fly the coop.

The handheld camerawork can be rough at times, and here and there Zexer steps a little heavily on the pedal of metaphor: A long tunnel works a touch too hard to flag Layla's struggle between freedom and family duty. But the director juggles different points of view with aplomb, and her strong script addresses with impressive subtlety the gap between what people say and what they do under extreme pressure.

The strands of her narrative come together to show how everyone is left the loser in polygamous marriage, a divide-and-rule institution that pits not only husband and wife against one another, but also women who would otherwise be inclined to mutual support. Mercifully there's no Hollywood ending here, only a bracing touch of mordant humor about interior decor that has the discreet hum of groundwork being laid, and rebellions yet to come.

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