



POTENTIAL FILMS

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CAST

Miri Kalderon..... MILI AVITAL
Gila Sasson..... ANAT WAXMAN
Noodle.....BAOQUI CHEN
Izzi SassonALON ABOUTBOUL
Matti Guetta.....IFTACH KLEIN

CREW

Director..... AYELET MENAHEMI
Script.....SHEMI ZARHIN and AYELET MENAHEMI
Producers.....ASSAF AMIR and YOAV ROEH
Executive producersLEON and MOSHE EDRI, DUDI ZILBER, ELI MEIROWITZ
Director of Photography.....ITZHAK PORTAL
Editor.....EINAT GLASER-ZARHIN
Sound designerAVIV ALDEMA

FILM INFO

Origin: Israel
Language: Hebrew
100 min, 35mm, color
Rating: PG (Mild coarse language)

FESTIVAL

Awards/ Festivals: WINNER - Grand Prix of the Jury - Montreal World Film Festival, Official Selection - Santa Barbara International Film Festival, Official Selection - Palm Springs International Film Festival

SHORT SYNOPSIS

At thirty-seven, Miri is a twice-widowed, El Al flight attendant. Her well-regulated existence is suddenly turned upside down by an abandoned Chinese boy whose migrant-worker mother has been summarily deported from Israel. The film is a touching comic-drama in which two human beings as different from each other as Tel Aviv is from Beijing accompany each other on a remarkable journey, one that takes them both back to a meaningful life.

AYELET MENAHEMI ON "NOODLE"

THE IDEA

"Years ago I was away on a month of meditation, when Noodle suddenly surfaced. It took me totally by surprise, feeding off life-long experiences and impressions that had been ripening, subconsciously, forever. Characters, dialogue, a title and story line.... it was all there, and by the end of that month I even had an imaginary cast, a poster and a theme song. The years have flown by, and everything changed, although the key components remained:

CHINA

At the age of thirty I went to Asia for an unlimited time. My first stop was China, where I traveled for four months. I covered the country, from Shanghai to the Silk Road, in trains, buses, wagons and on foot, and throughout the entire journey I didn't understand a single word that was said. Still, despite the unforgettable experience of alienation and lack of communication, or perhaps because of it, this incredible country has left an unforgettable, indelible mark on me, and is constantly on my mind.

FOREIGN WORKERS

A few years ago the State of Israel woke up one morning to realize that hundreds of thousands of illegal foreign workers live in its midst. The Immigration Administration was set up in 2002 and was assigned a daunting task by the prime minister at the time, Mr. Ariel Sharon, to ensure that within a few years all foreign workers without a valid visa be deported.

The foreign workers issue has become a topic that even news-shy people like me had to deal with. In recent years the print and electronic media have been swamped with news, reports, pictures and grave stories dealing with the deportation policy and its outcomes.

In researching the film I approached Sigal Rozen, head of the Foreign Workers' Aid Center. As someone who is exposed to foreign workers' worst case scenarios, day in day out, I wanted to confirm with her that the story of Noodle and his mother could really happen. "Yes," she said, and immediately launched into the telling of a very similar – and very real – story.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

Eight years ago a woman named Etti called me up, and with a cigarette-hoarse voice stated that she had never done anything like this before, but she absolutely must have a word with me. She had seen me on TV a few nights earlier. I had been a talk-show guest of Kobi Meidan, talking about Vipassana meditation and how it had changed my life. She wanted to hear more about it. Over the course of our conversations, we grew to become friends.

I was amazed by her life story. She was a senior El-Al flight attendant, twice a war widow. She lost her first husband in the Six Day War (1967), in the battle for the Suez Canal. Her second husband fell on the Golan Heights in the Yom Kippur War (1973). From Etti, I learned a thing or two about bereavement — an elusive creature, playing hide-and-seek with its owner its whole life, more covert than overt, more repressed than recognized. But Etti has also been endowed with a tremendous vitality and an uncommon sensitivity to others. That's why despite all the blows she's been dealt, she's a role model for optimism and how one can help themselves through helping others.

SUITCASE

I've always been charmed by the expression "take me with you in your suitcase." I would often say it myself. In my naiveté it seemed like a particularly picturesque and exciting way to travel. However, in this world of hijacked airplanes and increased security checks, a movie is the only place where such a fantasy might be realized.

THE SCREENPLAY

I've never viewed myself as a screenwriter. Conversely, Shemi (Zarhin) is — in my opinion — a wonderful writer and director. I thought he would be the perfect candidate to turn my idea into a screenplay. But Shemi refused to take it on. He's a true teacher, and a close personal friend, and he made me tackle the writing myself. He promised to help, and to guide me. Slowly, with each passing year, his involvement grew. The borders between who wrote what became blurred, passages he wrote got mixed up with those I wrote and those we wrote together, and the screenplay ultimately became the product of a true collaborative effort.

I could easily concentrate on the plight of bereavement and the nightmare of a marriage gone sour. It was quite tempting to expose the pain of foreign workers. But I preferred dealing with these tragedies from a humane and optimistic angle, to bring compassion and sympathy to the issue. I tried tackling these grave issues with greater simplicity, and the hint of a smile.

THE PRODUCTION

From the moment the idea came to me the leading character's name was Miri. The Chinese can't pronounce R, and therefore, from the early drafts of the screenplay, Noodle was pronouncing Miri as "Mili". Unfortunately I failed to notice that big hint, and until we were well into the casting process, I kept insisting there was no point in getting Mili Avital over to audition because she's not right for the part. I thought she was far too young and beautiful for the role of a widowed flight attendant. By the same token, I refused to consider Anat Waxman for the role of Gila, Miri's sister. I thought casting her was too predictable and too perfect. I also thought Alon Aboutboul was wrong for the part of Izzi, Gila's estranged husband. He's too well known (in Israel) and not wretched enough.

Meanwhile, in China, a Chinese casting agent auditioned 2000 children for the role of Noodle. I had serious reservations about one of the finalists, Baoqi Chen. Although he seemed like a charming boy, he looked far too happy and satisfied to play the part of an abandoned child.

This all leads to one of the more important lessons I learned throughout the making of this movie, with the help of my producers Assaf Amir and Yoav Roeh — nothing is as it seems. You have to stay open, and not stuck on fixed ideas. Looks are deceiving. I was really captivated by Anat, Alon, Yiftach and especially Mili and Baoqi. They all gave life to characters with whom I had spent long years in enchanting solitude; only Shemi Zarhin, as a co-writer and babysitter, had kept us company.

In rehearsals we had some magical moments, which every director and screenwriter is familiar with, when the fictional world he has created meets reality. One of those moments occurred when Mili Avital met Etti, the real woman who inspired Miri's character. Another moment was Mili's first meeting with Baoqi, who insisted on taking a comb and smoothing out her too-curly-for-his-taste hair. So was my discovery of the profound depth of feeling shared between Anat and Mili, forged of many years of tight friendship, which provided me with ready-made sisters.

I consider a film shoot of any kind to be a kind of miracle, and here we needed a multitude of miracles. Airplanes, airports, a child, a dog, locations in China - the least predictable country on earth — all these combined together to create a lethal cocktail that could easily kill any producer. The movie, initially planned as an official Israeli-Chinese co-production, ended up being a last-minute, unofficial commando production. In Beijing's freezing cold, with a Chinese crew and a seemingly endless series of impossible situations, we ran from one location to the next, never knowing what will hit us next. Whenever anything would miraculously turn out alright, we would congratulate and reassure ourselves with a term we coined to explain the miracle that had just happened: Noodle Magic. And then we would move onwards to the next obstacle.

STORY OUTLINE

The sun's shining brightly as Miri Kalderon (played by **Mili Avital**), 39, an El-Al senior flight attendant, returns home exhausted. The overnight flight home had been long, and all she wants is to go to bed. It's not going to happen: the Chinese maid is hardly half way through the weekly house cleaning, and Miri's sister Gila (**Anat Waxman**), is there, too. Gila has made Miri's house a base of operations from which to manage the ongoing crisis that is her marriage to Izzi (**Alon Aboutboul**).

Miri thinks nothing of the maid's request to watch her young son (**Baoqi Chen**) as she briefly runs an errand. But when the maid leaves — and fails to return — Miri finds herself stuck with a sister fighting for a divorce, a brother-in-law asking for validation and a six-year-old Chinese boy sitting in her living room, silently waiting for his surprisingly missing mother.

Miri's dull life takes a dramatic turn. Twice widowed, having lost everything she had ever loved, she had come to embrace a lifestyle that, in its monotony, granted her peace. Her sister's failing marriage provided her with all the drama she needed.

Miri finds the sudden turn of events tedious and unnecessary. She has no need for a withdrawn and silent Chinese boy. As she waits, endlessly trying to reach the boy's mother, she tries to break his sullen silence. She's met with failure in both efforts.

As Miri, Gila and their friends track down the missing maid's address, the reality of the situation slowly surfaces: The boy's mother has been deported to China. And although the boy was born in Israel, there's no legitimate record of his birth; legally, he doesn't exist. There is no simple, proper way of flying him to China and reuniting him with his mother.

Miri and the boy slowly bond. Their relationship is born not only out of necessity but also out of a shared fate: two lonely people longing for others loved and lost to them. They become partners in their shared plight. Their alienation and miscommunication is replaced by trust and love.

With the aid of her sister Gila, her brother-in-law Izzi and a childhood friend named Matty Guetta (**Iftach Klein**), an adventurer and writer of travel books, Miri takes matters into her own hands. In a heroic act she tries to restore the natural order of things.

Noodle is a touching comic drama, spun around Miri's life-affirming adventure and the captivating plight of an abandoned Chinese boy. It is also the story of relationships between sisters, husbands and wives, and friends and strangers. In its setting and resolution, there is also the light shed on an Israeli reality that is both funny and sad.

THE CAST

MILI AVITAL (Miri Kalderon)

I had been looking for a challenging, complex role for quite a while; an interesting character distinctly different than myself, embedded in a good script, attached to a talented director — it's a combination that's hard to come by. I had been hoping for a Hebrew-speaking part to suck me in and restore my grip on my Israeli identity in the deepest way possible. And how better to do that than by playing a woman who has lost two husbands to the Israeli wars, and who is now stuck at home with a child with whom she can't communicate? Miri's alienation and mine intersected at a curious crossroads, but it was only the beginning of a long haul because Miri and I are such opposites.

When I first met the flight attendant upon whom Miri's character was founded, she told me of the loss of her two husbands, a kind of loss that is difficult to grasp. When she was notified of her second husband's death, she described how she leaned against the wall and simply fell to the floor. I immersed myself in additional materials that were hard and heavy, things related to losing husbands in war — but that one moment she described was engraved in my heart. I tried to create the same physical response in Miri, this downward spiral. We literally used weights around my ankles, cushioning and makeup, to create the heavy burden under which Miri was operating, the load she carried with her every moment of every day. I tried creating a change — not a physical metamorphosis, but an energy transfer... As opposed to my personal hyperkinetic energy, Miri is tired, lost, slow, heavy. She's a woman who is learning to smile again, thanks to Noodle.

The feeling on the set was like being home, for better and for worse. Contrary to American formalities, in Israel I was welcomed with open arms. At first it was hard. I wasn't used to this kind of instant intimacy. At the same time, I had to find Miri's emotional core, and she's not exactly the life of the party.

I was lucky to be working with amazing actors, with whom I happen to have personal relationships. It was a little strange, to play someone so different from myself, not particularly likeable, alongside people who know me so well. But we all found our characters over time and we enjoyed acting from within our own familiar reality.

Mili Avital started her acting career at 17, while still a high school student at Talma Yalin, Israel's premier school for the arts, performing in the prestigious Cameri Theater's production of **Les Liaisons Dangereuses**. At the age of 18 she was chosen for the leading role in "**Yael's Friends**", a TV drama by Nadav Livyatan. In 1994, having won the Israel Film Academy award for her role in the movie "**Beyond the Sea**", and attaining the status of an up-and-coming young actress to watch, she decided to move to New York to study theater. A year later, while waitressing in a small restaurant, she was approached by a NY-based agent who offered her an audition. In the space of two weeks Mili found herself playing the lead role in the blockbuster Hollywood movie, **Stargate**, opposite Kurt Russell and James Spader. From there she went on to other roles, working with directors such as Jim Jarmusch, John Avnet, Robert Benton and actors such as Johnny Depp, Gabriel Byrne, Benjamin Bratt, David Schwimmer, Tim Roth and many others.

In 1995 Mili was named the most promising young actress of the year by Vanity Fair magazine. In 2000 she starred in the much acclaimed **Arabian Nights** miniseries that was nominated for an Emmy Award. She has also appeared in several TV series such as **Law and Order**.

Mili has appeared in several Israeli productions such as **Shabatot VeHagim**. She starred in the acclaimed film **Columbian Love**. In 2004 she produced, filmed and directed the documentary **I Think Myself I Am All the Time Younger** screened at the NY Tribeca festival. In the summer of 2006 she played King Lear's Cordelia at the prestigious Electric Lodge Theater in LA.

Mili lives in NY with her husband, the screenwriter Charles Randolph.

ANAT WAXMAN (Gila Sasson)

"It all started with a phone call on the evening of Yom Kippur. It was my best friend Mili Avital, asking me to play her sister in Ayelet Menahemi's movie... Fifteen years ago I did "Tel-Aviv Stories" with Ayelet.

I wasn't very keen on playing, yet again, somebody's sister..., but Mili insisted I read the script. And so I was blessed with Gila, who helped me navigate my own divorce while we were shooting.

I could have killed for this part, but I had second thoughts about working with Mili. I was afraid it would ruin our tight friendship. Working together, I found out a lot about her I did not know beforehand. I didn't know she is so talkative! She needs to first grasp a scene intellectually, and only then will she move on to its emotional and active parts. I work more instinctively, from my gut. She needs to know all there is to know, whereas I don't need to know too much; I allow the director to lead me, blindly. Mili needs utter silence to concentrate on a scene, whereas I make a hell of a racket before shooting, until the director's call for action.

We found our way, learning from each other. Our relationship was already in place. We were constantly there for each other, gossiping, joking. My fear of losing her friendship turned into a great happiness, and our bond grew stronger. In the end, not only did I not lose a friend, I gained a sister."

One of Israel's most valued and busiest actresses and comedians, Anat Waxman graduated Beit Zvi acting school in 1984, and hasn't stopped working for a moment since. Alongside a great career in Israeli theater, she is also an acclaimed, multi-award-winning TV and movie actress. She appeared in **Passover Fever** and **Don't Give a Dam**. In 1993 she won the Israeli Oscar for her role in **Tel Aviv Stories**, and again in 2005 for her role in **Nina's Tragedies**. In 2001 she embarked on a TV comedy career with the **Life Isn't Everything** series, for which she won the 2005 Golden Screen award for best comedian. She went on with the successful show **Gomrot Holchot** and played in the theatrical hit, **The Best of Friends** with co-stars Keren Morr and Sarah von Schwartz. Waxman has been nominated four times for the theater award, and her stage performances include many successful hits such as **The Ketubah, The Dolls' House, Sylvia, Mother Courage, Midsummer Night Dream, Nora, As You Like It, Pygmalion, Chapter B**, and others.

She's on the permanent staff of the Cameri Theater.

ALON ABOUTBOUL (Izzi Sasson)

Alon Aboutboul is one of Israel's leading screen actors, with film credits that seem to cover all Israeli movies made over the past quarter of a century.

He made his big screen debut in **Morning Star** at the age of 15, while still a Talma Yalin high school student. He has made dozens of movies since, including: **Planet Blue, 51**

Bar, Ricochets, One of Us, Passover Fever, Marco Polo: The Missing Chapter, Clean Sweep, Beaufort and Nina's Tragedies. He has also had a part in foreign productions such as: **Rambo 3, Killing Streets, and Munich.** He is twice the winner of the Jerusalem Festival "**Best Actor Award**", and the Haifa Festival "**Film Actor of the Decade**" award. Apart from his movie career, he also played in numerous stage productions, as well as in successful TV dramas and series, such as **Shabatot Vehagim, Imal'e,** and others.

Aboutboul is known for his social and political involvement. He writes poems, has his own blog, teaches direction to actors, does narration and voice over work, and never ceases to surprise others by pushing the boundaries of his work. In recent years he's been producing and directing documentaries, and has taken part in the third season of reality show **Dancing with Stars.**

Aboutboul lives in Tel-Aviv with his partner Shir and their four children.

IFTACH KLEIN (Matti Guetta)

"Last day of shooting. The Beijing Grand Central Station. It's dawn, and the air is frozen. I don't know who had to be bribed to let us film here, but this place is out of this world. The old trains, the broad platforms allowing for the officials' cars to get up-close to the train to pick up some dignitary or other, the funny looking foodstuffs sold as snacks. Our schedule is tight.

At night we go out to celebrate the end of the shoot. A gourmet dinner in a fancy hotel. We're all tranquil and collected. There is something about a cast and crew rallying all their energy to see an artistic vision come true, which makes them get close to each other in a very short time. Attaining a mutual goal begets inter-dependence. Once the job is done, and the goal obtained, you can take it easy. That's when the awkwardness and distance creep in. We are all quiet. The food is spicy and we are all helping ourselves to more.

This part of the process is done. We're still a ways off, but the most intensive and critical phase, and the most exciting one, is over. We're already saying our goodbyes, toasting life. Our accomplishments and errors will speak for themselves. I'm thinking, there's so much love in this room...what an incredible profession."

Klein was born in Tel-Aviv, but grew up in the farming village of Batsra. Fresh out of the military, he enrolled at the Jerusalem extension of Nissan Nativ acting school and as soon as he graduated, he was accepted both to the Gesher Theater and the TV series **Tironut** (Boot Camp). He opted for Tironut where he played a soldier who shoots his abusive father. Since then he continued playing in TV series such as **The Institute, Hachatzer, Puzzle, A family and a half, and the Mythological Ex.** In recent years Klein has devoted himself to the stage, and has established his standing as a young, successful actor through a series of impressive performances, and especially in **High Noon**, which won him the TeatroNetto first prize. He was also highly praised for his stage performances in **Fat, Bad boys, Chapter B, and Death of a Salesman.**

Klein lives in Tel-Aviv with his partner and mother of his two children, Shiri Artzi.

BAOQI CHEN (Noodle)

"I love Israel so much. I loved playing with water and sand and gathering shells by the Mediterranean waterfront. I liked the cast and crew and have lots of fine memories from the filming.

When I first came to Israel, Ayelet, the director, helped me adjust so I'd act better in the movie. We also went shopping for toys. When we started shooting the movie, she reassured me I can play the part. I got right into it. What I was most excited by was that on the Chinese New Year's Eve we played a scene where I had to cry and right after that they let me talk to my mom in Shanghai, which was very exciting. When the filming was over and it was time for me to go back home, Ayelet took me to the airport, and even after I got back home we kept chatting online. She still looks after the tree I had planted.

I often recall the tasty chicken soup that Anat, the actress, cooked for me, and going with her daughter to play in the park. Mili is a beautiful actress. She really loves me and I miss her lots. I taught her some Chinese.

I also miss all the cast and crew, like Ben Gal who used to hang out with me when I was off the set, playing ball, skating, and turning chairs with me. "

Baoqi Chen was born October 1998, the year of the Tiger according to the Chinese calendar. His mother is an elementary school teacher and his father is a clerk for a commercial company. Like most Chinese children, he is an only child. He was born and raised in Shanghai, and attends Jingan elementary school, alongside approximately 30 classmates. He won the school's first prizes in writing, poetry and story telling, and is fourth in school in performing arts. Math is his favorite subject.

Baoqi likes sports — swimming in particular — and takes piano and karate lessons. He also loves chocolate and ice cream and doesn't really care for noodles.

Baoqi has appeared in a few small dramatic and commercial television roles in Shanghai.

THE FILMMAKERS

AYELET MENAHEMI - writer and director

Ayelet graduated Beit Zvi, majoring in filmmaking, with honors. Her debut featurette "**Crows**" (1986) won many prizes and citations in film festivals around the world. In the early 1990's she directed **The Skipper III**, followed immediately by **Tel Aviv Stories**, in which she directed the episodes of **Sharona Honey** (with Yael Abekassis in her first acting role), and **Divorce** (with Anat Waxman, who won the Israeli Oscar for her part).

In 1993 Ayelet traveled extensively through the Far East. Upon her return she embarked on commercial directing and the production, direction and editing of documentaries. Her documentary **Doing Time, Doing Vipassana** (co-directed and produced with Eilona Ariel) won many prizes around the world, including the "**Gloden Spire**" in San Francisco International festival and the **PASS Award** of the American Council of Crime and Delinquency. Her following documentary, again co-created with Ariel, **It's About Time**, won the Jerusalem Festival **Wolgin Award** and the prestigious **Japan Prize**.

Noodle is her first feature film in 14 years.

SHEMI ZARHIN- Writer

Shemi Zarhin is a screenwriter and director. He was born and grew up in Tiberias. He graduated from Tel-Aviv University, School of Television and Cinema. He is the recipient of the 1996 Ministry of Education award for cinema.

His first movie as screenwriter and director, **Passover Fever** (1995) won the best screenplay award at the Montreal Festival and was screened at more than 200 festivals

around the world. His movie **Dangerous Acts** (1998) won seven Israeli Academy Awards including Best Direction. His movie **Bonjour Monsieur Shlomi** (2003) won 20 awards in various international festivals, and was distributed commercially overseas.

Shemi has been teaching scriptwriting and direction at the Sam Spiegel School in Jerusalem since its inception. He has also written the scripts for the movies **Tel Aviv Stories** (1992), **Family Secrets** (1997), directed dozens of commercials, some episodes of **The Other Woman** television series, edited and advised on many scripts, authored articles and reviews in the press, taught direction at the Tel Aviv University, and more. His movie **Aviva My Love** premiered in the summer of 2006, and is considered one of the most successful Israeli movies of all times.

ASSAF AMIR - Producer, Norma Productions

Assaf Amir, one of the most prolific television and movie producers in Israel, studied filmmaking in New York and San Francisco. In 1995 he founded **Norma Productions** through which he has produced feature films such as **Afula Express**, directed by Julie Shlez (Best film award at the Jerusalem Film Festival, six prizes from the Israeli Academy including best film, and others), **Chronicle of a Disappearance**, directed by Illia Souliman (prize for a debut film at the 1996 Venice Festival, the ARTE prize and the Israeli Review prize), **Broken Wings**, directed by Nir Bergman (Best film Award at the Tokyo Film Festival, three awards at the Berlin Festival, best Film at the Jerusalem Film Festival, nine Israeli Academy awards including Best film, and others), **What a Wonderful Place**, directed by Eyal Halfon, (recipient of the judges' Panel Prize and Best Film at the Karlovy Vary International Film Festival, Best film Award at the Jerusalem Film Festival, The Israeli Academy award for Best film, and others). Assaf has also produced many documentaries and television series, such as **Reaching for Heaven**, directed by Jacob Goldwasser and Roni Ninyo (Best Drama Series Award at the Jerusalem Festival, recipient of the Israeli Academy Award for Best Drama Series).

Assaf's latest production is the **The Cemetery Club**, a feature-length documentary directed by Tali Shemesh, recipient of many international awards.

YOAV ROEH - Producer, Norma Productions

Yoav studied filmmaking at the Sam Spiegel School from 1993 to 1998. Following graduation he worked as first assistant director in on the movie **Clean Sweep** and the television series **Kinneret's Secrets** and **Hafuch**. He then proceeded to produce the movies **Summer Story** (directed by Shmuel Haimovitch), and **Miss Entebbe** (directed by Omri Levi), which was commended at the 2003 Berlin Festival. He joined Norma Productions as the executive producer of **Broken Wings**. He co-produced the movie **What a Wonderful Place** with Assaf Amir, and the documentary **Melting Siberia**.