

The Midnight Orchestra

A Film by Jérôme Cohen Olivar

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SYNOPSIS

In 1974, the celebrated musician Marcel Botbol suddenly left his native land of Morocco under mysterious circumstances. His disappearance led to the breakup of his beloved band, The Midnight Orchestra.

Thirty years later, Marcel's son Michael is summoned to Casablanca by his father. Unfortunately their reunion is short-lived as Marcel dies shortly after arriving. Michael wants to bury his father in Israel, but soon realizes his father's close connection to Casablanca. At the news of Marcel's passing, a large number of Moroccans are overcome with grief. Stunned, Michael sets out on a journey to find the musicians who performed with his father and thus rediscover his own identity.

Hiring a taxi to go to the Jewish cemetery in Casablanca, Michael meets Ali, an eccentric driver, rough around the edges, who, upon learning that he is the son of Marcel Botbol refuses to be paid for the trip. He confesses to Michael that he was a true fan of his father's music and offers to be Michael's guide in his quest for the truth. Their offbeat adventures lead Michael to reunite the famous Midnight Orchestra.

The story is full of vibrant characters traumatized by the unexpected departure of Marcel Botbol, characters that we remember long after the moving and poignant finale.

Written and Directed by Jérôme Cohen Olivar

Starring Avishay Benazra and Aziz Dadas
Special Appearance by Gad Elmaleh

DETAILS

Genre:	Comedy, Drama
Running Time:	102 minutes
Country of Origin:	Morocco
Language:	Arabic, French, English (with English subtitles)
Aspect Ratio:	1.85:1 Flat

INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR JÉRÔME COHEN OLIVAR



Jérôme Cohen Olivar spent the majority of his childhood in Morocco where he made movies on super 8 mm film before leaving for Los Angeles. His first short film *Susan Susan*, a satire about secret immigration to the United States, was bought by Disney for about \$300,000 dollars. With his childhood friend Albert Levy, Jérôme Cohen Olivar produced his first feature film titled *Unveiled*. In 2008, the director signed *Kandisha*, a fantastic film inspired by the Moroccan legend Aisha Kandisha dating from the 14th century. In 2014, his first horror screenplay was bought by Oren Peli, the cult filmmaker behind the worldwide success *Paranormal Activity*.

How did you come up with the idea for The Midnight Orchestra?

The idea for the film came to me completely by chance, during a dinner where I met the singer Marcel Abitbol. I was in Paris for my daughter's wedding. At the end of the ceremony, he rose and began to play the violin. I found the score very beautiful and I went over to him and we began to talk. After asking him some questions I felt that he played his own Moroccan nostalgia, a nostalgia that he didn't want to admit. It was this dichotomy between his will to hide his wounds and his nearly forced adaptation to living in France that showed an interesting clash between his personality and his life's choices which was similar to many people who had left Morocco in search of a better future. These people are, for the most part, deluded in their basic life choices; they have lost a part of the peaceful living that one has when they are in their own native country, and this is the essence of the Moroccan Jewish nomad. So I felt that, and that sent me back to my own journey. I left like Avishay when I was 17, 18 years old myself, for the United States where I studied, worked a little, and returned to Morocco in 2003. It was there that I directed my first Moroccan film *Kandisha* which got me a lot of criticism, regarding my identity, which meant that I was not French or Canadian, I was a Moroccan Jew! And rather than express myself with words, I preferred to make this film in order to respond to my imaginary critics in a way that fits my taste more and would show them who I really was. I had already directed this film very simply, with a modest budget made from some private funds and money from the Moroccan cinematographic center, without having some objective outside of wanting to express myself.

How did you choose the actors?

That was made by a combination of bizarre forces and of accidents. Without getting too much into the details, we found ourselves in many months into shooting the film and without the main actor. Sylvia, my wife, wanted to present an actor to me. I said to her that I had not made many films and when I made one I chose my own actors. She insisted, so I looked at photos of Avishay and I thought that he had a good look but I was not sure that he could act. So I met with him and the magic took effect!

The thread of the film unfolds in many iconic places in Casablanca. Is there a particular reason behind this choice?

It was not truly a conscious choice; all the film's developments came to me in a totally intuitive way, even instinctive. It was not a film where I had reflected outside of the screenplay - I above all let my instinct speak. Nothing was calculated and I hope that that can be felt in the final product.



INTERVIEW WITH ACTOR AVISHAY BENAZRA



Avishay Benazra, born May 24 1985 in Morocco, is a comedian, author, composer, and Moroccan-Spanish actor. Guitarist and experienced percussionist, he is fluent in five languages and is qualified as a world-citizen. At the age of 13, he joined the Theater FOL troupe in Casablanca, which was his acting debut. At 18 years old he left Morocco for Canada to pursue his college education at HEC Montreal, during which he developed his musical competency and author-composer aptitudes. In June of 2013, he dedicated himself to searching for roles on stage and in films.

You're the face of Jerome Cohen Olivar's new film The Midnight Orchestra, can you pitch us the film?

The Midnight Orchestra is above all a story of love, a quest of identity and heritage. It's the story of a Jewish Moroccan family that left Morocco during the Yom Kippur war, but it's especially the story of this son who returns at the request of his father and who begins a quest for his identity by going on a search for his father's orchestra that remained in Morocco.

What appealed to you about this film?

At the script reading, what appealed to me above all else was the writing. I had the impression that role was written for me, since it corresponded to me on many levels. In the first place, I am Jewish Moroccan myself. I left Morocco very young - at the age of 18 - for Canada, Spain, and France to go to school and discover other facets of life, so I was able to align myself, to link myself intimately to this character. Michael Abitbol had immersed himself in music like me, he was in finance, which was also the case with me since I had studied finance in Montreal, and I also had a tense relationship with my dad. I had therefore very simply found a part of myself in this character. I felt an obligation to play this part in this film, as he told our story, my story and the story of each Moroccan Jew that had left Morocco!

How had you collaborated with Jerome Cohen Olivar? How do you describe working with the director?

My meeting with Jerome happened by chance and still I can hardly believe it! I was brought in by his wife, who is one of my acquaintances and referred me to him for the

lead role. We met and what ensued was an alchemy created between us, which made him choose me for his marvelous project. Working with him was a month and a half of pure happiness, because he taught us, but but he also allowed us to give him our best. For me he was a musician who played us like instruments, he knew us according to pure sound and created a magnificent piece.

Did this role demand a lot of particular preparation?

A little. As it was my first main role in a full length feature film, I needed a good month and a half of preparation, punctuated by a little stress. I took this time for entering in the mindset of the character who is someone somewhat cold, somewhat broken on the inside, therefore I would truly put myself in character. It required a little preparation for incarnating this and a little time to leave it after shooting.

Did your musical background help you in this preparation?

Evidently, I had always thought that my musical background played a little part of myself. However, during the shooting, we were always singing and dancing backstage. When I returned at night, I composed these little songs about the film, about this story that I lived, in relation to one's roots, I think that the music influenced and made me the man that I am today.

Tell us some of your stories from shooting ...

Honestly, we had one and a half months of stories, of laughs all day, of joy, it was happy. The best story I can tell you is that of the famous day where we acted the water-scene. We had to be in the water for seventeen hours at 2AM when it was 14 degrees Celsius in the ocean and in the pool. It was rather unpleasant, but it's a heartwarming memory.

How did the shooting go with Gad El Maleh and Hassan El Fad?

You don't have an enormous amount of time while shooting, but it was very well spent. There was good cohesion, good harmony. As for my part, I stayed in character, I didn't allow myself to swerve from it, so there was all the same a certain rigidity that you could find in the character that i couldn't leave, but they were well received.

What are your next projects?

As for films, I'm preparing for my next role which will begin shooting in April 2016 and which will take place between Paris and Morocco. As for music, I'm preparing a musical comedy which will begin in October of 2016 and which will play more than 90 dates in all of the Zeniths of Paris. ||

INTERVIEW WITH ACTOR AZIZ DADAS



Born in Casablanca on May 14, 1970, Aziz Dadas is a Moroccan comedian and actor that made his debut on stage at 9 years old with the Al Assil Association. In 2002 he entered the seventh art with the opportunity opened to him by his role in *Casa Daylight* by Mostapha Derkaoui. In 2005, he started acting in television alongside Said Naciri in different sitcoms. He is largely known to the public thanks to his role of police chief Zerkaoui in “Zero”, Ouchen in “Road to Kabul” and many of his diverse roles in “One Hour in Hell” (Saaa fel Jahim).

(reflective remarks the night of the preview-showing)

I imagined another film, I actually didn't have the chance to see it until the premiere. I had read the screenplay many times, it was more a question of knowing what manner Jerome would direct this film because he is the master on the subject. We waited to know what he would expect from us. The shooting was magical, the team brilliant, we had a very strong, human experience: I discovered what an extraordinary person Avishay is. We acted together and we became very close, it's clear he's like a brother to me as soon as I reflect on the memories from shooting that we went through, you don't find this in just anyone else.

I was happy because we had to run by Jerome the dialogue styles and the manner of pronunciation. Thank god we got a good result from all this work! I hope that my future projects will be of the same high brow level as this one. I am the type to give 100 percent in my projects because I adore films, I love my films and I defend them until the end despite their style!

I wish you all my best, long live film and see you next time. Thank you.

QUOTES

"When the emotion is right, the work is masterful. And the emotion is there, it's right, and it's strong in this film, which will have you go from laughing to crying again and again. Marvelous performance by Avishay Benazra, suspended in the thrilling thread of a story of friendship." – Le 360

"Plunges you into the heart of a story about the quest for identity, love, and brotherhood that's sprinkled with humor. Faultless casting... Mika and Ali make a moving duo."
– L'Economiste

"A deeply moving story. Bravo." - Albayane

"An excellent and tender duo." - WIBME

"A truly beautiful film, with exceptional actors. Profoundly human." – MARS Radio

"Masterful. A star is born." - Challenge

"A generous and poetic epic, a message of humanity and love through music and memory. Touching and moving, with a lot of poetry and a pronounced taste for the past and memory, the director succeeds in making a film bursting with sincerity and generosity. Beautifully profound... A must-see." - Les Inspirations Eco

"A poetic, emotional and nostalgic comedy that addresses the question of Jewish-Moroccan identity." - L'Observateur

"A charming work, full of poetry." - Cinenews

