

Crescendo

A Film by **Dror Zahavi** | Starring **Peter Simonischek** (*Toni Erdmann*)

Inspired by Actual Events



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When a world-famous conductor tries to create an Israeli-Palestinian orchestra, it takes all his skill and resources to overcome the discord and get them to play in harmony.

When world-famous conductor Eduard Spörck accepts the job to create an Israeli-Palestinian youth orchestra, he is quickly drawn into a tempest of sheer unsolvable problems. Having grown up in a state of war, suppression or constant risk of terrorist attacks, the young musicians from both sides are far from able to form a team. Lined up behind the two best violinists – the emancipated Palestinian Layla and the handsome Israeli Ron – they form two parties who deeply mistrust each other, on and off-stage alike. Will Spörck succeed and make the young people forget their hatred, at least for the three weeks until the concert? With the first glimmer of hope, however, the political opponents of the orchestra show them how strong they are...

Inspired by Daniel Barenboim's West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, award-winning filmmaker Dror Zahavi ("Alexander Penn", "For My Father") directs this gripping drama as a constantly growing 'crescendo', the tension and conflicts rising until the last frame. European Film Award-winner Peter Simonischek ("Toni Erdmann") stars next to a highly talented collection of up-and-coming actors including Daniel Donskoy ("Victoria") and Sabrina Amali ("4 Blocks"). A remarkable movie and contribution to the global efforts towards understanding, humanity and peace.



Audience Award | San Diego Jewish Film Festival

"Rheingold" Audience Award | Festival of German Films Ludwigshafen

Gershon Klein Award | Jewish Film Festival Berlin & Brandenburg

Technical Details

Country of Origin: Germany
Language: English, German
Running Time: 106 minutes
Aspect Ratio: 2.39:1 Scope
Format: Color



Cast

EDUARD	PETER SIMONISCHEK
RON	DANIEL DONSKOY
OMAR	MEHDI MESKAR
KARLA	BIBIANA BEGLAU
LAYLA	SABRINA AMALI
JUSSEF	HITHRAM OMARI

Credits

Directed by	Dror Zahavi
Screenplay by	Johannes Rotter Dror Zahavi
Produced by	Alice Brauner
Co-Producers	Marcus Machura Thomas Reisser Peter Trenkwalder Michael Zechbauer
Cinematographer	Gero Steffen
Music	Martin Stock
Editor	Fritz Busse
Sound	Oliver Jergis
Production Design	Gabriele Wolff
Casting Director	Cassandra Han
Costume Designer	Riccarda Merten-Eicher Julia Schell
Hair & Make Up	Elisabeth Dietrich-Fry Monika Knauf Karla Meirer Simone Schlimm
Production Manager	Andreas Born
Assistant Director	Raimond Schultheis

Peter Simonischek - Actor

Peter Simonischek is an award-winning Austrian actor, known for starring in the Academy Award-nominated **Toni Erdmann** (2016) and numerous other films. After graduating from the Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts in Graz in 1970, he performed in various theatre productions, including at the Schaubuhne Berlin, where he was a member of the famous Peter Stein Ensemble. He has been a member of the Burgtheater in Vienna since 1999.

Since 1980, Peter Simonischek has appeared in over 60 films.

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY:

Crescendo 2019 – Eduard

The Command 2018 – Admiral Vyacheslave Grundzinsky

The Interpreter 2018 – Georg Graubner

Only God Can Judge Me 2017 – Vater

Wunderlich's World 2016 – Walter Wunderlich

Lou Andreas-Salome 2016 - Gustave von Salome

Emerald Green 2016 – Graf von St. Germain

Toni Erdmann 2016 – Winfried | WINNER, *European Film Award – Best Actor*

Sapphire Blue 2014 – Graf von St. Germain

Biest 2014 - Jager

October November 2013 – Vater



Dror Zahavi – Director

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY:

2019 – **Crescendo** – Director

2008 – **For My Father / Sof Shavua B'Tel Aviv** – Director

Awards of the Israeli Film Academy 2008 – Best Actor (Nominee)

Awards of the Israeli Film Academy 2008 – Best Supporting Actor (Nominee)

Awards of the Israeli Film Academy 2008 – Best Supporting Actress (Nominee)

Awards of the Israeli Film Academy 2008 – Best Screenplay (Nominee)

Awards of the Israeli Film Academy 2008 – Best Art Direction (Nominee)

Awards of the Israeli Film Academy 2008 – Best Music (Nominee)

Awards of the Israeli Film Academy 2008 – Best Sound (Nominee)

Hamburg Film Festival 2008 – Art Cinema Award (Nominee)

Hamburg Film Festival 2008 – Screenplay Award (Nominee)

Jerusalem Film Festival 2008 – Best Israeli Feature (Nominee)

Moscow International Film Festival 2008 – Audience Award (Winner)

Moscow International Film Festival 2008 – Golden St. George Award (Nominee)

Sofia International Film Festival 2009 – Grand Prix (Winner)

Stony Brook Film Festival 2009 – Festival Grand Prize (Winner)

1992 – **Der Besucher** – Director



Alice Brauner – Producer

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY:

Crescendo 2019, feature film, director: Dror Zahavi

To Life! / Auf das Leben! 2014, feature film, director: Uwe Janson
Romy Gala, Austria 2015 – Favorite Actress (Winner)

Wunderkinder 2011, feature film, director: Marcus O. Rosenmüller
Atlanta Jewish Film Festival 2012 – Audience Award Best Narrative (Winner)
Buster International Children’s Film Festival 2011 – Danish Writer’s Guild Best Screenplay for Children (Winner)
Cinekid 2012 – Best Feature Film (Nominee)
Giffoni Film Festival 2011 – Best Film (Winner)
Giffoni Film Festival 2011 – Best European Film (Winner)
Jerusalem Film Festival 2011 – Best Feature (Winner)
Jupiter Award 2012 – Best German Actress (Nominee)
Palm Springs International Film Festival 2012 – Best Narrative Feature (Nominee)
Romy Gala, Austria 2012 – Best Producer (Winner)
San Diego Jewish Film Festival 2012 – Best Feature Film (Winner)
Stony Brook Film Festival 2012 – Best Feature (Winner)



THE TIMES OF ISRAEL

In film ‘Crescendo,’ an Israeli-Palestinian orchestra struggles to get in tune

Director’s Interview | *True to its name, the German film directed by filmmaker Dror Zahavi reaches a fever pitch as musicians from both sides of a conflict learn to play in sync.*

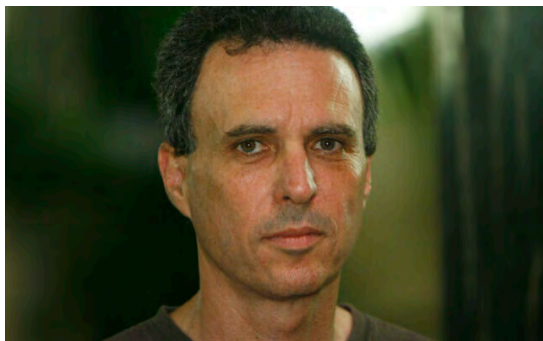
By Rich Tenorio
16 January 2020

In a historic Austrian chalet, young Israeli and Palestinian classical musicians rehearse for a peace concert under the direction of their German maestro, Eduard Sporck.

They have been living and practicing here to separate themselves from the day-to-day tension of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Yet their sessions here have been tense as well — Sporck led an attempt at group therapy that devolved into shouts of “terrorist!” and “murderer!” But now, performing Vivaldi, the orchestra seems to be coalescing.

Even the two top violinists, Palestinian Layla and Israeli Ron, who have had numerous antagonistic exchanges, are moving toward detente. As the strings work toward a crescendo, Ron plays with his eyes closed and Layla casts him a meaningful glance.

This is a scene from the new German film “Crescendo,” directed by Israeli-German filmmaker Dror Zahavi. The exploration of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from an orchestral perspective features both Israelis and Palestinians in its cast. “Crescendo” makes its general premiere on January 16 in Germany.



“I’m amazed by the response it’s getting,” Zahavi told The Times of Israel in a phone interview. “In every film festival spotlight, we got an award,”

including in Ludwigshafen, the Berlin International Film Festival, the Berlin Jewish Film Festival, and in Warsaw.

In each of the film's first four screenings, Zahavi said, it was shown before audiences of 1,200, for a total of about 5,000. "People were standing for ovations of 10 minutes," he said. "I'm not exaggerating."

The film will screen in its US premiere as an official selection of the New York Jewish Film Festival on January 28.

Its story is fictional, yet there is precedent for real-life orchestras comprised of both Israelis and Palestinians. Perhaps the best-known is the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra that was started by conductor Daniel Barenboim and the late Palestinian scholar Edward Said.

"To tell you the truth, I don't think there are any similarities between Sporck and Barenboim," Zahavi said, adding that there are multiple Jewish-Arabic orchestras in the world.

Yet, he said, "of course the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra of Daniel Barenboim is an inspiration for me," and added that of its various counterparts, "it's true his orchestra is the most famous."

Through a spokesperson, Barenboim declined to comment for this article.

Zahavi noted that there are significant differences between Barenboim and Sporck, who is played by acclaimed Austrian actor Peter Simonischek, whose previous films include "Toni Erdmann" and "The Interpreter."



Unlike Barenboim, who is from Argentina and in 2008 was granted Palestinian citizenship in addition to his Israeli citizenship, Maestro Sporck is trying to overcome a dark family past as the son of Nazi mass murderers. A key scene has Sporck discuss his family background with his orchestra. He reveals that while they have been in Austria, he has visited an

elderly woman who prevented young Sporck from being shot by the people who killed his parents.

“There were times in my life when I hated her for it,” he tells the orchestra. “It would be easier if I had been shot together with my parents.”

“The greatest hate between people is Jews and Germans,” Zahavi said. Yet, he added, “it can be an example for overcoming. When you’re in a very conflicted state, you think you can’t overcome it. That’s why we made him like this. I think it’s very important sometimes to explain, especially to young people born into the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and sometimes have no more hope that it can be solved, to show one day that there are more, bigger conflicts that can be solved.”

Some of Zahavi’s past work has also addressed the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, such as “For My Father” in 2008, in which a Palestinian suicide bomber learns to connect with his intended targets as friends. He said that he filmed “Crescendo” a year and a half before the opening of the American embassy in Jerusalem, but added that for the Israeli-Palestinian cast “there were always some political issues that influenced persons from the two groups, for sure.”

Sporck stresses coexistence in the film. He tells the musicians, “I thought I would never be able to travel to Israel, but then I created our project. I had to do so, go to Israel, and I did. I went to Tel Aviv, the lions’ den.”

“Israelis and Palestinians, they can live together,” he tells them. “It’s possible. Perhaps not today or tomorrow, but it is possible if you work at it. Not your children, not your grandchildren. You have to do it.”



Zahavi notes another difference between veteran conductor Barenboim and Sporck, who “just gets the mission to create this orchestra for only one concert.” But that one concert entails a herculean amount of effort.



It’s shown in the difficulties encountered by Layla (Sabrina Amali), who lives in the West Bank city of Qalqilya. Layla must practice in an environment affected by confrontations between Palestinian protestors and Israel Defense Forces personnel. In what Zahavi describes as a Palestinian practice, she smells an onion to keep practicing during tear-gas strikes. When she brings her instrument to a checkpoint en route to an audition in Tel Aviv, she is rudely interrogated

by a female IDF service member who cannot understand why she has a violin case.

At the audition, Layla encounters racist behavior from Ron (Daniel Donskoy), who recommends members of his chamber ensemble — “Israelis who look like Arabs” — who could be used by the maestro instead of Palestinians.

There are also some encouraging signs. Layla is chosen over Ron as concertmaster, and an improbable friendship blossoms between two of the younger musicians, Palestinian clarinet player Omar (Mehdi Meskar) and Israeli French horn player Shira (Eyan Pinkovich). Yet Ron stirs up fellow Israeli musicians to protest Layla’s leadership role, and a rehearsal becomes a shouting match of alternating calls of “Jerusalem!” and “Al-Quds!”

No matter what the different ensemble members call the city, the entire group relocates to Austria, where Sporck expects them not only to perform together, but also to live together. In addition to the rehearsals, he holds therapeutic sessions that Zahavi says have real-life parallels.



The director said his team did a lot of research for these therapy sessions and spoke with neurologists and psychiatrists. “There are methods of therapy that are not for individuals but groups — Jews and Nazis, for examples, homosexuals and homophobes. You don’t treat one person but you treat the groups.”

He said that many cast members were seared by the scene in which they confront each other across a room.

“I asked them to curse, to blame the other side with killing the families, ask them to tell the other side they hate them,” he recalled. “A lot of them started crying. Two fainted. One said,



‘I can’t say, I don’t want to say I hate Arabs. I don’t hate Arabs. I won’t say it.’ She was getting hysterical. I explained to her that if she says she hates Arabs, it doesn’t mean she personally hates Arabs. She was just a character in the film.”

“Some very heavy conflicts came out,” Zahavi said. “There were some very bad, difficult moments there. It was an occasion I will never forget.”

Yet after this dramatic confrontation, things seem to get easier. Layla explains her family narrative of exile in the wake of the 1948 War of Independence. Sporck details his parents' war crimes at Buchenwald. Omar and Shira cement their friendship in another group therapy session: After a call for someone to try on the other side's headgear, Omar volunteers to wear a kippah, while Shira dons a hijab. A romance develops with a sweet scene in a swimming pool.

"You know, when you are 16, the story is innocence," Zahavi said. "The fact their first kiss is underwater means, also, another dimension, another world. It's not in the real world... It is our trying to show how things could have been."

But as the group moves towards coexistence, the specter of the conflict continues to loom over them.

Zahavi hopes his film will reverberate not only with audiences, but also with the Israeli-Palestinian cast.

"In spite of the suspicion that existed at the beginning, they found each other, very quickly — I won't say friends, I don't think there are any connections of friendship between them now, I don't know — but I think all of them took a very strong message with them," Zahavi said. "They will carry the fact that Palestinians and Jews were, for something like seven or eight weeks together, living together."

"Maybe," he said, "they will know it is possible to live together, if you have an aim, if you just ignore the difficulties."



<https://www.timesofisrael.com/in-film-crescendo-an-israeli-palestinian-orchestra-struggles-to-get-in-tune/>