

FOXTROT

Israel (2017) 113 minutes

Director: Samuel Maoz

Cast: Lior Ashkenazi (Michael Feldman)

Sarah Adler (Daphna Feldman)

Yonatan Sharay (Jonathan Feldman)



Screening 22 January 2020 at Swindon Arts Centre

Synopsis

A desolate military border checkpoint is manned by four young Israeli conscripts who endure the hours of boredom that occur between cars arriving for inspection. Woe betide any pack of Arab revellers who drive up drunk and allow their belongings to roll out of the car. Then the soldiers are liable to get jumpy.

Meanwhile, Michael and Daphna are devastated when Israeli army officials show up at their home to announce that their son Jonathan has died in the line of duty. However, the circumstances surrounding the tragic news take unexpected twists . . .

Reviews



Foxtrot blends stark, drab realism with the kind of images only film can provide. A soldier dances with his gun at a checkpoint, a bulldozer lifts a car, a camel walks through a checkpoint like it's part of his routine, a grieving father watches a dance class, the world going on even though his has changed - Maoz's film is one in which it feels like every decision has been carefully considered like a note in a symphony.

It is at its best when it feels the most open to interpretation - even the title, a dance in which the dancer returns to the same place he started, has meaning, of course. It's a film designed to move you with its depiction of senseless tragedy but also to spark that part of your thinking process that only movie-making can tap.

It has been a controversial film in Israel for one of its plot points, but it feels to me like a movie that speaks to cultures and people around the world. It is both specific and universal at the same time.

rogerebert.com

The film is a compelling family tragedy played out in three acts; a nightmarish triptych of loss, waste and grief that is nonetheless arranged with such visionary boldness that it dares us to look away. The world, it tells us, is random and inept – as likely to kill you by mistake as on purpose.

In the first section, Jonathan Feldman, a young conscript in the Israeli army, is dead. His mother Daphna collapses at the news and his father Michael is full of cold fury.

The second section jumps without warning from the Feldmans' oppressive apartment to the blighted northern Israeli border. Four young soldiers are manning the roadblock and one of this quartet is none other than Jonathan Feldman.

The third section lands us back in Tel Aviv six months later. It details the management of grief and implicitly shows how Israel's collective hurt and anger are passed down in the bloodline, trapping its citizens in a ghastly holding pattern until they collapse from sheer exhaustion and the futility of it all. It is a fierce, urgent, unflinching picture.

Film Facts

- It was mistakenly believing that he had lost his daughter in a terrorist explosion that gave Maoz the idea for the film.
- Maoz was criticised in Israel for his depiction of the Israeli Defence Forces and accused of being anti-Israel.
- The film won the Grand Jury Silver Lion award at the Venice Film Festival in 2017. It also won the Israeli Ophir Awards for Best Film, Best Director and Best Actor and was the Israeli entry for the Best Foreign Language Film at the 2018 Academy Awards. It made the shortlist, but did not receive a nomination.

Xan Brooks, The Guardian