

Looking for love in Israel

Film explores one woman's search for happiness

By Daniel M. Kimmel

A young female photographer falls in love with the image of a man who pops up in one of her photos, and she tries to find him. In a nutshell that's the plot of writer-director Michal Bat-Adam's 1999 feature "Love at Second Sight."

Movie Maven

Yet as this Israeli feature unfolds, it's clear she has much more in mind. The movie is a meditation on finding – and keeping – love.

We first meet Nina (the stunning Michal Zoharetz) posing for her grandfather (the late Yossi Yadin), a professional photographer. Her parents divorced when she was young and she lived with her grandparents. After they die she moves in with an old widower (Nathan Cogan) and works as a newspaper photographer. One day an old woman she's photographing asks her why she isn't married, what is she waiting for? Nina says she's waiting to fall in love, and the woman laughs. One can love God. Human love is less predictable, and less perfect.

On the street Nina sees a horrible scene: a man is threatening to jump off a building. Nina starts snapping pictures of the scene, and when she develops them, she sees the young man (Alon Aboutal) whom she decides is meant for her. She can't identify or locate him, and spends the rest of the film engaged in that search.

While she does so, she encounters multiple examples and definitions of love, from the stories of her grandparents' loving but strained relationship, to the surprising tale of the widower's marriage, to the various people she meets in her search. By film's end, Bat-Adam gives us a resolution of sorts but leaves it to the viewer to determine what hap-



PHOTO BY THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR JEWISH FILM.

A woman undertakes a difficult quest in "Love at Second Sight."

pens next. Like the arthouse favorite "Before Sunrise" (1995), this a movie that has more questions than answers about romance.

The intensity of the performers makes up for the story being so slight. Zoharetz plays Nina as an intelligent woman who fully realizes the quixotic nature of her quest but isn't willing to give it up. Yadin, perhaps best remembered to American audiences as the grandfather in "Lies My Father Told Me," and Cogan provide the rueful voices of experience, yet tellingly both characters refuse to sour on love. Aboutal is basically the hunk in the photo until late in the film, where he ably sketches in his character's bemused confusion.

If you're used to films from Israel being "issue" films, here's one where the issue isn't peace or the burden of history, but the possibility of making human connections in an imperfect world.

"Love at Second Sight" is available through the National Center for Jewish Film for \$36. Public performance rights separately available. Call (781) 736-8600 or go to www.jewishfilm.org.

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