

synopsis

As the son of the Imam of the local Brooklyn mosque, eleven year-old Daud has to juggle the high expectations of his Father (Maz Jobrani) and his feelings of isolation and difference— even from his peers in the Muslim community. Through an innocent act of good faith, Daud inadvertently befriends a group of Jewish boys who mistake him as a fellow classmate at their orthodox school, in the neighboring Jewish community. A genuine friendship grows between Daud and Yoav, one of the Jewish boys, and his family. Unable to resist the joy of a camaraderie that he has never felt before, David, as he is known to the kids, is drawn into a complicated dilemma inspired by youthful deceit and the best of intentions.

background

DAVID is a street-level look at an eleven-year-old Muslim boy's struggle to fit in within his family, community, and wider world. What starts as an innocent mistake develops into an unlikely friendship. Two boys, both of conservative religious backgrounds, find commonality in each other. Their connection is born out of a closeness that reflects the unique positions of both the Arab and orthodox Jewish communities in America: they both strive to live modern lives while retaining their core religious and cultural virtues. *DAVID* is first and foremost a story of friendship between two boys. The film questions the boundaries of our cultures and religions and looks at how static and yet fluid these boundaries can be.

We also wanted to show the tension that exists within conservative communities living in America—as told through the story lines involving Daud's family. His father, Ahmed, embodies the "old ways." Playing the role of a conservative Imam in New York puts him in the middle of challenges that he never would have been trained to deal with in his home country, as members of his community and family engage with the offerings of an open and different world.

His resistance to change is shown through his conflict with his daughter, Aishah, who is desperate to go to university – not as a way of escaping a conservative upbringing, but rather because it is the path that will allow her to realize her dreams. Like many Muslims in America, Aishah's struggle is one of retaining her core Muslim identity, while at the same time becoming part of the fabric of American society.

The film is not our attempt to provide answers to issues of prejudice, culture or religion—as they run far deeper than the scope of a film—but rather to raise questions in a different tone; questions we hope can help us better understand a little bit about each other, and ourselves.

It was truly a special experience to watch the actors who played Daud and the Jewish boys interacting when the camera was off: an Arab boy and five Jewish boys playing, joking around, and being friends. Directing the children to act out cultural prejudice and violence was difficult; when left to their own devices, they immediately found common ground.



press

"Bridging one of the world's defining sociopolitical rifts one 11-year-old at a time, quietly engaging indie DAVID brings charm, sympathy and understatement to its microcosmic story of a young Muslim Brooklynite whose circumstances lead him to pass as Jewish. . . . DAVID's many small virtues add up to a winning whole, its message of cultural reconciliation presented sans preachiness, melodrama, easy answers or sweeping generalities. Non-pro juvenile performers are very good, while comedian Jobrani (best known as co-founder of the Axis of Evil Comedy Tour) is excellent as the rather mirthless but well-intentioned dad. Kid's-eye view of Gotham life is just right, design and tech contributions apt in their crisp simplicity."—VARIETY, Dennis Harvey

". . . message of open-mindedness and tolerance."—Kevin Laforest, *Montreal Hour*

". . . refreshing feeling of authenticity."—Brendan Kelly, *Montreal Gazette*

". . . Screenwriting books are fine if you want to write a big, loud action movie. I'm glad Fendelman and his cast and crew chose to make "David," a small, quiet film that packs a unique punch."
—Chance Shirley, *Magic City Post*

"David packs in a long history of religious tension with elegance and respect. Its star, Muatasem Mishal, carries the film like a trained veteran. It's a story that should appeal to all ages and personal beliefs."—Kyle McKinnon, Sidewalk Moving Picture film festival

"David is a tender, well-acted, and bold religious drama that reveals the positive and life-affirming qualities of Islam and Judaism."—Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat, Spirituality and Practice.com

"The chemistry between Mishal and Shtaynberger is muted but genuine, and the boys, although not trained actors, are both charming."—George Robinson, *The Jewish Week*

awards



DAVID is honored to be the 2011 recipient of the esteemed Ecumenical Prize, awarded at the Montreal World Film Festival.



interview

WITH THE CO-WRITER/DIRECTOR JOEL FENDELMAN

How did the idea for the story first come about?

The story first came to me from a deep-rooted feeling of being different. I grew up in Miami, where most of the population is Hispanic and I was one of the very few Jewish kids in my high school. It's not that I experienced extreme prejudice or anything of that matter, but just something that I think most people can relate to, the feeling of not fitting in. Fast-forward 15 years, and I'm living in New York City post 9/11. I remember riding the subway and seeing a traditionally dressed Muslim man enter the train. The first thoughts that came to mind were "I wonder if he's a terrorist." Days later I sat with that thought, bothered by my ignorance I decided to learn more about Muslim Arab culture.

I spent the next year volunteering at the Arab American Association in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn where I helped teach English to Immigrant Muslim women and lead a youth group during the summer. It was one of the most profound experiences where I learned that my preconceived notions were of course untrue and I was completely embraced as a Jew and an American. During this time the story was formed by taking that seed of struggling to fit in and applying it to the vehicle of an eleven year-old religious Palestinian Muslim boy, arguably the most alienated culture in the United States today. I teamed up with co-writer Patrick Daly and spent the next year hashing out the full feature script *DAVID*.

Why did you choose to set the story in Brooklyn?

Brooklyn is a fascinating melting pot of immigrant cultures that have kept many of the traditions and customs from back home. There were two particular neighborhoods that were most intriguing to me for the purposes of this film, Bay Ridge, a predominantly Muslim Palestinian neighborhood and Borough Park, an orthodox Jewish neighborhood. Both neighborhoods are adjacent to each other, having much overflow, where Muslim men in robes will on a daily basis pass orthodox Jews in black suits and hats. In a sense this area is proof that a peaceful way of life is possible in contrary to the situation in Israel today. This special place of cross over allowed for the story of *DAVID* to take place.

How does your own identity play into the meaning of the film?

As a thirty-year old Jewish American, a large part of the journey in writing this film was my own exploration of identity. Over my year of research, I spent a significant amount of time in the orthodox Jewish communities of Brooklyn as well as the Muslim communities. I also spent a month living in the old city of Jerusalem. During this time, I learned a great deal about the word "Identity." The way it is used can alter how we perceive ourselves and others, even if nothing tangible ever changes. When I look at the film, particularly the ending, the meaning really comes alive to me. The question "Can Daud and Yoav be friends?" *DAVID* is asked. As an idealist, I say yes. As a realist, I say no. The only thing left . . . is to ask why.

interview

WITH THE PRODUCER JULIAN SCHWARTZ

How did you get involved with the film?

I watched Joel's short *Daud*, and was intrigued. When Joel first took me out to Bay Ridge to show me around, I was so impressed with the inroads he had made in the community. A walk down 5th Avenue had Joel talking with various shopkeepers, and kids from the Arab Association where he volunteered stopped to say "hi." I was overwhelmed with my own ignorance and prejudice on this first visit to what was for me a very distant and separate world, just 15 minutes by train from where I lived.

What was the biggest challenge making the movie?

In April 2010, we had a script, an eleven year-old lead actor who was available for three weeks in July, and that was about it. Given the economic climate and our lack of a track record, coming up with the proposed budget for the film had proven challenging. I sat down with Joel, and said: "I'd love to shoot the movie this summer, but we're not going to get it financed, do you want to wait a year and keep trying to raise the funds?" Joel felt that we needed to shoot in July. He said he had a little money saved up that he was willing to invest in the film, and we decided to move forward.

The biggest challenge was working with limited resources. We had nowhere near the budget we had hoped to be working with, so we just couldn't afford to hire people to help. Joel and I worked 18-hour days for three months finding a cast, crew, locations, and doing everything else necessary to shoot the movie in Brooklyn that July.

Describe the experience of shooting on a micro-budget.

The 21-day shoot was grueling, but our young crew was so dedicated and professional, they really made it happen. The people in the communities of Bay Ridge and Borough Park could not have been more open and helpful, and they provided unfettered access to some key locations. There was more than one incidence of: "It's 4pm, and the location for tomorrow's 7am shoot just fell through, can you find a Muslim family home and see if they'll let us use their living room?" I would start talking to people in stores and on the street, and sure enough someone would lead me to a house where the owner's brother's cousin had a friend who was willing to help - "Inshallah!".

I have 15 years of experience in production, but this is the first feature film I've produced. When we started I was told by countless people "good luck," or "you need to wait a year, you can't make this movie with so little money." I was up for a challenge and felt confident that I could make it happen. In retrospect it was good that I had not been through the process before, because now I see what they were talking about!

We were fortunate at each stage of our process with this film to find people who were willing to help. I'm very proud of *DAVID*, and am grateful to all who contributed time, energy, and talent to the movie.

the casting process

After several rounds of auditions we cast both union and non-union talent for the main adult roles. However, it was four days into the shoot before we had Maz Jobrani (who plays the father) locked. Like most things in this film, this critical piece magically fell into place at the last minute!

The lead boys are both non-professionals we found in the communities. *Muatasem Mishal* (Daud) was from the youth group at the Arab American Association where Joel volunteered. As Joel describes: "He was this glowing kid with green eyes that were completely enveloping." *Binyomin Shtaynberger* (Yoav), Joel found while having a script meeting at a kosher café in Borough Park. "I was sitting with my co-producer and liaison to the community Yuta Silverman and this kid walks in with his father. I looked over to Yuta and said 'Yoav is just like that kid.' We turned our chairs and it started from there."

The first meeting between Muatasem and Binyomin was especially poignant. We wanted to do a screen test of sorts, so we had them meet us in Sunset Park on a Sunday afternoon. Binyomin arrived with his mother and father, sister and brother, an orthodox Jewish family from Borough Park. Muatasem arrived with his older sister in full hijab (Muslim headscarf). It happened to be the Sunday following the incident on the Turkish flotilla in 2010. Muatasem was wearing his "Free Palestine" yellow bracelet. We sat down under a tree, and the boys, cautious at first, slowly began to open up, and were soon chatting about cars and basketball. Apart from Muatasem's experience shooting the short film with Joel the year before, neither boy had any prior acting experience. We spent a couple of hours with the boys, playing basketball, improvising a couple of scenes, and just letting them hang out. It was clear right away that we had two very special kids, and that we had found our two lead actors.





maz jobrani AS DAUD'S FATHER

The Interpreter – Opposite Sean Penn / Nicole Kidman

Axis of Evil Comedy Tour – HBO / Comedy Central

Vince Uncensored - CBS



creative team

joel fendelman **WRITER PRODUCER DIRECTOR**

For the last six years, Joel Fendelman has been in New York producing and directing award-winning films. His documentary feature debut *Needle Through Brick* which surveys the quickly vanishing art of traditional arts in Borneo through the eyes Kung Fu Masters won the Silver Palm award from the Mexico International film festival.

He has directed a number of award-winning short films that have been accepted and shown at prestigious film festivals, including Cannes, Chicago, Miami, Woodstock and IDFA. *DAVID* is Joel's narrative feature debut, a very personal yet universal film about identity told through the unlikely friendship of a young Muslim and orthodox Jewish boy living in Brooklyn. Joel received his BFA in film and television from the Savannah College of Art and Design and currently lives in Brooklyn.

patrick daly **WRITER PRODUCER CO-DIRECTOR**

Patrick Daly is a director and producer who divides his time between academic and creative pursuits. After working as a consultant on several documentary projects, he directed *Needle Through Brick* in collaboration with filmmakers James Adolphus and Joel Fendelman. Patrick completed a PhD in archaeology at the University of Oxford. During this time he conducted extensive field research in Europe, South America, the Middle East and South East Asia. As part of this work he lived for extended periods of time on farms in England, with Bedouin in the deserts of southern Jordan, and in traditional villages in Borneo. Political and social reasons brought him to take up a position as a visiting professor at An-Najah National University in Nablus, Palestine. He spent more than a year living at the center of the Palestinian/Israeli conflict. It was during this time that he was convinced to pursue filmmaking as a vehicle for telling stories about pressing cultural and social issues.

julian schwartz **PRODUCER**

Julian worked as a music producer for television and Film for 14 years. He worked on feature films, television commercials, and hundreds of episodes of animated television programming for Kids WB and FOX Kids including the children's hits "Pokemon," "Yugioh," and "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles." His feature film credits include "Hope and a Little Sugar," "Southie," "The Spell of The Unknown," and "Yugioh: The First Movie." Julian was born and raised in Montreal, where he graduated from McGill University with a Bachelor of Science in Human Physiology. He attended Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado where he received a BA in Music and Theatre, and studied Jazz Improvisation at New England Conservatory with Paul Bley.

Julian is also an actor, and has appeared on many regional and off-off Broadway stages as well as in numerous short films.

stephanie levy **EXECUTIVE PRODUCER**

A dynamic entrepreneur, Stephanie Levy has built her reputation on her proven expertise in developing creative talent into successful, high profile brands. As a hands-on Executive Producer, she adheres to her own business model – reaching out person-to-person to build the relationships that lead to wide distribution networks. Stephanie is also a committed animal advocate. Over the past few years, she has created community outreach programs and produced a number of short films and PSAs designed to raise awareness about compassionate treatment of animals.

A native of Montreal and long-time resident of New York City, Stephanie holds a MA in Psychology from the New School University. She is the niece of the late film director Robert Wise, and credits her understanding of film – from both a creative and business perspective – to the mentorship of the uncle whose memory she holds dear.

Stephanie is an Egyptian-American Jew. After spending time in both Egypt and Israel, she was particularly drawn to director Fendelman’s deft and sensitive treatment of the delicate subject matter of *DAVID*.

maz jobrani ACTOR PRODUCER

Maz Jobrani is best known as a founding member of the Axis of Evil Comedy Tour, which featured some of the top Middle Eastern-American comics in the world. The Axis of Evil Comedy Central Special premiered in 2007 as the first show on American TV with an all Middle Eastern/American cast. In movies Maz starred in the role of Moly in Ice Cube’s *Friday After Next*. He also played Secret Service Agent Mo in the Sydney Pollack thriller *The Interpreter*, opposite Sean Penn and Nicole Kidman as well as Jennifer Garner’s colleague, Glenn, in *13 Going on 30*. In television he recently shot a pilot for ABC titled *Funny in Farsi* and is recurring on ABC’s *Better off Ted*. He has been a regular on ABC’s *Knights of Prosperity* as well as FOX’s *Life on a Stick*. In 2008 Maz sold a TV show to CBS based on his life as an Iranian-American in the United States. The show was best described as a Middle Eastern “Everybody Loves Raymond.”

gil talmi COMPOSER

At only 38 years of age, Gil Talmi is a world-renowned Emmy nominated composer with a focus on socially conscious projects. His music can be heard in a variety of films, television programs and theatre productions. *Gil’s most recent work includes music for the award winning documentary feature New Year Baby* (Broken English Prods/ITVS), the 3 hour epic *Galapagos* (BBC/National Geographic), *The Mummy Who Would Be King* (Nova/PBS), *TED: The Future We Will Create* (Independent) and a TV series for Bravo called *TV Revolutions*. A gifted composer, Gil’s music reflects a wide spectrum of musical influences. His styles range from timeless orchestral to driving urban beats, from ethnic world music to electronic euro-pop. Gil was nominated for a *National News and Documentary Emmy Award* for his work on *CBS Evening News with Dan Rather*.



cast

Daud's Father	Maz Jobrani
Daud	Muatasem Mishal
Yoav	Binyomin Shtaynberger
Aishah	Dina Shihabi
Daud's Mother	Gamze Ceylon
Moshe	Michael Golden
Mendy	Daniel Luttway
Dovi	Markus Goldberg
Yoseph	Jared Kirsch
Rabbi	David Mandelbaum
Yeshiva Teacher	Noam Wienberg
Rami	Akram Basuni
Rami' Mother	Ayse Richardson
Rami's Father	Taufiq Abid
Yoav's Mom	Lara Gedzelman
Yussef	Abdo Almasmary
Rifqa	Aya Abid

crew

Director	Joel Fendelman
Co-Director	Patrick Daly
Writers	Joel Fendelman, Patrick Daly
Producer	Julian Schwartz
Executive Producer	Stephanie Levy
Producers	Joel Fendelman, Patrick Daly, Maz Jobrani
Execuive Producers	Andrew Cohen, Jason Dubin
Co-Producer	Yuta Silverman
Original Music	Gil Talmi
Director of Photography	Robbie Renfrow
Editor	Joel Fendelman
Additional Editors	Martin Levenstein, Chris Houghton
Art Direction	Shruti Parekh
Assistant Director	Kevin Hartmann
Associate Producer	Asmi Fathelbab
Sound Design and Editing	Rick Secen
Re-recording Mixer	Martin Czembor

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