



DAVID

One boy. Two faiths.

Directed by Joel Fendelman

This year's crop of films from the independent festival circuit include *Sound of my Voice*, directed by Zal Batmanglij, a dark look at a cult that meets in the San Fernando valley; *Pariah*, directed by Dees Rees, about a young African-American woman's struggle to come to terms with her sexuality, and *Take Cover*, written and directed by Jeff Nichols, about a husband and father whose apocalyptic visions create havoc for his family and community. Each filmmaker employs

a sense of cinematic economy, that is; human beings in heightened conflict, placed in the locale of the everyman, minimally photographed. (*Take Cover*, with its smartly employed, minimal special effects, is the most ambitious of the bunch, technically speaking).

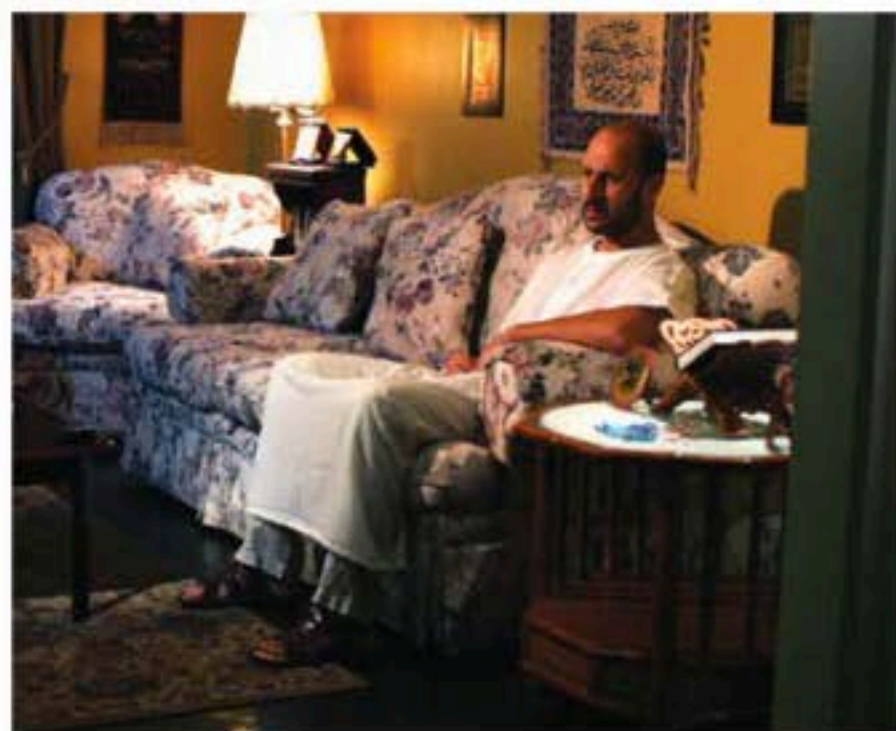
But of all of the independent films that I have

screened this year, my top pick is *David*, directed by Mr. Fendelman, a simple, yet profound tale of the journey of an eleven-year-old Muslim boy, Daud, who suddenly finds himself immersed with boys his own age at an orthodox Jewish school. Daud, or David, as he is known to the kids at the school, first encounters

the Jewish schoolboys after one of them forgets to collect his Torah from a park bench. Seeing this, Daud, younger sister in tow, fruitlessly gives chase, then shows up the next day to place the book into the school mailbox. Later that night, upon opening his knapsack, he discovers that he has not dropped the correct book into the school mailbox, but instead, a Koran which was presented to him as a family heirloom by

his father, skillfully portrayed by comedian Maz Jobrani. He returns to the school the next day, and after lingering at the door of the school with hopes of sneaking in to retrieve his family's Koran, he is corralled in by a Rabbi who mistakes him as a late arriving student.

Once he is brought to the classroom and placed at a desk, he tells the group that his name is David, and that his father is from Jerusalem. Day after day, he lingers





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after class in an attempt to retrieve the Koran. As his repeated attempts to snare the book from the Rabbi's office fail, he is forced to play out the charade that he has erected.

Daud's father, a devout Muslim, admonishes him for being absent from recitation studies, while his older sister wrestles with the choice of attending Stanford University on a full scholarship, or stay home and enter an ar-

ranged marriage. Burdened with these pressures, Daud is unable to resist the joy and camaraderie with his newfound Jewish friends, a joy that he has never felt before. Torn between his need to fit within his own family and community and a desire to be part of a wider world with people of a culture diametrically opposed to his own, Daud finds himself at a crossroads that examines the boundaries of our

cultures and religions, and discovers how static and yet how fluid these boundaries can actually be.

Set in Brooklyn, the story resonates in regard to how close to home the themes examined in the film actually are. Says Fendelman: "There were two particular neighborhoods that were most intriguing to me for the purposes of this film, Bay Ridge, a predominantly Muslim Palestinian neigh-

borhood, and Borough Park, an orthodox Jewish neighborhood. Both neighborhoods are adjacent to one another, 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."

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Produced on a micro budget, *David* is a triumph. The cinematic narrative is delivered through effective cuts, simple photography and, most importantly, a story that actually matters. Its message at the film's conclusion will leave every viewer to question any preconceived ideas about either side of the Jewish/Palestinian question. In addition to provoking thought and discussion, this is a beautiful, entertaining movie and is, by far, the most important independent film of 2011. *David* is a must see for moviegoers of all ages; yes, it is completely child friendly and yes, do take them with you. □