

Mongrel Media Presents

The Cemetery Club

"Mo'adon Beit Ha'kvarot"

A Film by Tali Shemesh

(2006, 90 mins, Israel)

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THE CEMETERY CLUB

Synopsis:

10 o'clock, Saturday morning. A group of elderly women and men carry plastic lawn chairs across the Mount Herzl National Cemetery in Jerusalem. In the shade of an old pine tree, they sit down, in a circle and discuss matters sublime and elevated.



For over two decades, the "Mt. Herzl Academy" has held its weekly meeting at this cemetery. Seated between the graves of the nation's dignitaries, they debate the history of modern philosophy, read poetry, eat lunch and determine the fate of the Jewish nation.

Director Tali Shemesh has been following the "Academy" for the last 5 years, focusing on two members: Minia, the director's grandmother, and Lena, her great aunt.



The film unravels the jagged, intense, almost impossible relationship between these two extremely different women, who – each bereaved of the man she loved – remain bound together by history and Fate.

As death decimates the group that has given meaning to their lives, the film explores the conflicts between Lena and Minia, and the family secrets that haunt them. The result is a poignant, intimate, sometimes hilarious portrait of the Holocaust generation like you've never seen it before.

Selected Festivals & Awards:

- The European Film Academy Nomination for Best Documentary 2006 
- *Docaviv Int'l Film Festival* | Tel-Aviv | Official Competition | Opening Film | April 2006 | Prizes: the Mayor of Tel-Aviv Award, The Photography Award 
- *HotDocs Int'l Film Festival* | Toronto | Official Competition | April 28th 
- *Shanghai Festival* | Shanghai | Official Competition | June 2006 | Prize: The Magnolia Award for Best Asian Documentary  第十二届上海电视节
THE 12TH SHANGHAI TELEVISION FESTIVAL
- *Cannes Int'l Film Festival* | Cannes | Tout le Cinema Du Monde | May 2006 
- *Sarajevo Film Festival* | Sarajevo | Special Panorama Screening | August 2006 | 1 of 10 Public Awards 
- *Int'l Women's Film Festival* | Rehovot – Israel | September 2006 | Official Competition | Prize: The Best Film 
- *Dok Leipzig* | Leipzig | Official Competition | October 2006 | Prize: The Golden Dove Award for Best Documentary 
- *IDFA* | Amsterdam | Reflecting Imagas: Best of Fests | November 2006 
- *Miami Int'l Film Festival* | Miami | Official Competition | March 2007 

Critics:

"An audience enchanter... At times wickedly funny, at others poignantly human...docu with scope and depth"

- Deborah Young, **Variety**, August, 2006

"Despite the title the filmmaker has created a playful and witty film with many layers. And a strong main character whose dramatic life-story is treated with subtitle balance between humor and drama. It is a wonderful piece of filmmaking with careful editing and rich in detail."

- **Dok-Liepzig Jury**, The Golden Dove Award for Best Documentary, Nov. 2006.

***** "Celebration of life. Sensitive, clever, funny, and above all – compassionate. Excellent".

- Haim Keinan, **Kol Israel**

***** "Captivating, Funny and moving... made with plenty of talent. A must see!"

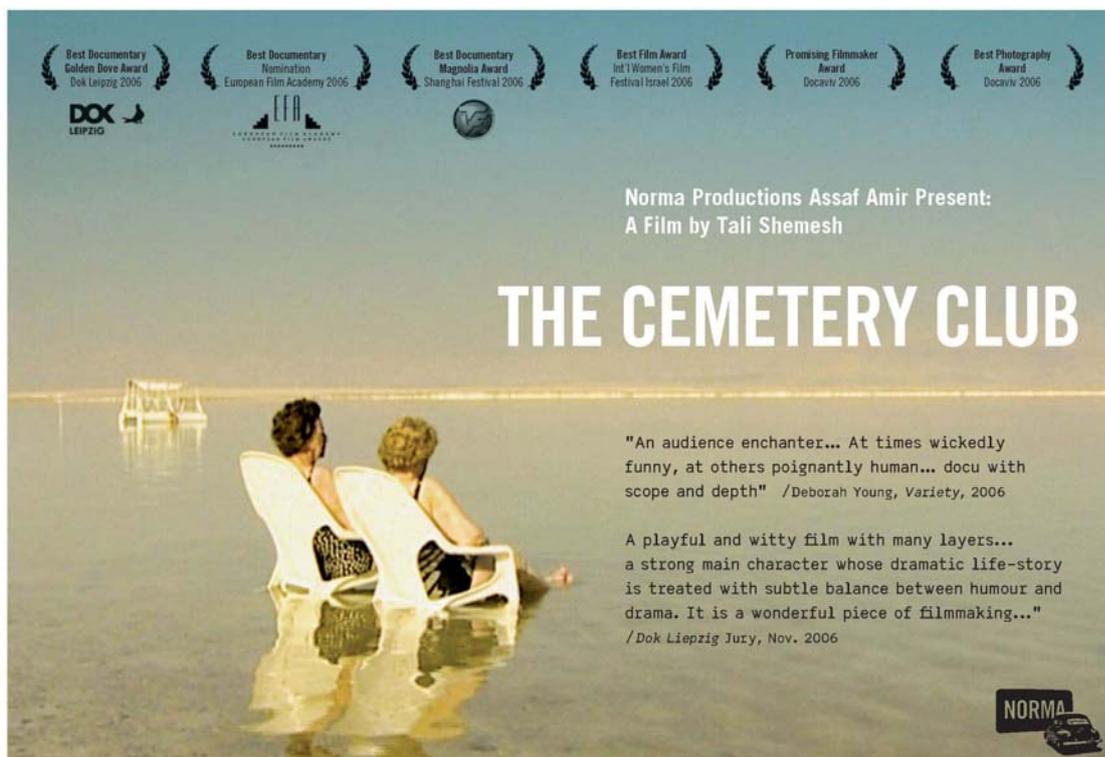
- Yael Shuv, **Time Out**

***** "A beautiful film with precious moments"

- Yair Rave, **Cinemascope**

***** "Heartbreaking. One of the most moving documentaries I've seen"

- Yair Hochner, **Seret**



Filmography of Tali Shemesh (Director):

Films

T.V Dreams (Documentary/51 mins/2001)

Produced by EDEN productions-Broadcast by Channel 8.

Festivals and awards

Honorable mention-Docunoga film festival-Israel-2001

Haifa international film festival, Israel – 2001

Miss Fat & Beautiful (Documentary/53 mins/1998)

Produced and Broadcast by TEL-AD-Commercial Channel 2.



Festivals and awards

FIPA International Film Festival-France-1998

The Contemporary Issues International Film Festival of Portugal-1999

3rd place-The San Luis Obispo International Film Festival-California-1998

Honorable mention-The U.S International Film Festival-Chicago-1998

Honorable mention -The USA Film Festival-Dallas, TX -1998

To be a Queen (drama/15 minutes) 1994

Produced by the Sam Spiegel Jerusalem Film and Television School

Festivals and Awards

The Jewish International Film Festival-1994

The Karlovy Vary Film Festival-Czech Republic-1995

The Huesca Film Festival-Spain-1995

The Brisbane International Festival-Australia-1995

L'Alternativa film festival, Barcelona-1996

The Montpellier International Film Festival-France-1996

Special Honorary Mention-Israel Annual Short Film Competition-1995

Israel Film Center Excellence Grant-Ministry of Trade and Industry-1995

Special Directorial Mention-JTFS Annual Short Film Competition-1994

Filmography of Assaf Amir & Guy Lavie
(Producers)– Norma Productions

- **Broken Wings** – a feature film written and directed by Nir Bergman. Among the many awards the film won are the **Tokyo Grand Prix** for Best Film at the Tokyo International Film Festival 2002 and The Panorama Audience Award at the Berlin International Film Festival 2002.
- **What a Wonderful Place** - A Feature film by Eyal Halfon. Won the Israeli Academy Award for Best Feature Film 2005 ; the Best Actor Award & the Grand Jury Prize at Karlovy Vary Int'l Film Festival ; the Best Picture Award & the Best Actor Award at Jerusalem Int'l Film Festival.
- **Melting Siberia** - A Documentary film by Ido Haar. Participated in Silverdocs, 2005. Won the Best Documentary Prize at the Anonimul International Independent film festival, 2005, and a special mention at the Jerusalem Film Festival, 2004.
- **Chronicle of a Disappearance** – a feature film by Elia Suleiman. The film won the Best Film by a New Director Award at the Venice Film Festival in 1996 as well as many other awards, including 1996 Critics' Choice for the Best Israeli Film.

LIFE LESSONS LEARNED WITH THE CEMETERY CLUB

by *Deryck Ramcharitar*



Tali Shemesh, director of *The Cemetery Club*

Mount Herzl, named after the father of political Zionism, stands in Jerusalem host to a national cemetery where many Israeli leaders are laid to rest. Among these deceased giants, a small group of elderly men and women walk, lawn chairs in hand, to sit under a nearby pine tree and discuss everything from poetry to Palestine.

In *The Cemetery Club*, director Tali Shemesh brings us a penetrating glimpse into the lives of the "Mt. Herzl Academy" members, specifically following her grandmother, Mynia, and her great aunt, Lena over a period of five years. Shemesh said that she has known about the group since she was a child and wanted to tell a story about Jewish elders that simply showed them living their life, not as holocaust survivors, or old folks, but just as people.

"Most films with older people are very serious with the holocaust survivors. They don't let you see the life of these people," says Shemesh.

The film, making its international premiere at Hot Docs, is incredibly successful in avoiding the oversimplified treatment of the elders by exploring the conflict and camaraderie between two very different women. Lena and

Mynia find themselves bound together by family, the "Academy", and a haunting past.

The idea of balance permeates the entire film, on many different levels. We see the elders sitting near a cemetery as they themselves are close to death. Yet, it is here that many of

them come to life. The Cemetery Club is beautifully intimate in its exploration of love and loss, which linger over these elderly citizens as they speak candidly about their own faults and their respective families. At one point, while Lena is describing her days in the Jewish ghettos, the camera is focused directly on her face and we see her strength slowly begin to decay.

Shemesh balances this by also focusing the camera on people who are not speaking. One "Academy" member struggles to light her cigarette, remaining wholly focused on this task while we hear the others in the group discussing events as heavy as Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union. This simple act becomes incredibly fascinating, almost drowning out the politics being conversed upon in the background. The director includes herself in the film, as well as discussions about the project between herself and her great aunt Lena, somewhat breaking the fourth wall. The opening scene shows Lena openly and adamantly protesting to Shemesh the use of "The Cemetery Club" as the title.

"It was important to show how [Lena] disagrees with me," said Shemesh, who establishes at the outset that her perspective is different than that of her subjects. These scenes are but another layer of intimacy we are exposed to in the film, which moves deeper and deeper into the very hearts, minds and souls of Mynia and Lena.

"It was very hard to make the film, says Shemesh. "it's about my family...it was hard to find a way to do it and stay out of it also." The veteran director said that her family was uneasy at times, but in the end, the film drew her closer to her aunt Lena.

Although Shemesh said she was not trying to change anything with this work - highlighting that it is not an activist film - it may help change the perception of

the Holocaust generation for many. In Tel Aviv, the film is set to play in commercial theatres and has sold out all its screenings, an incredibly rare feat for documentaries in Israel.