

YES

A FILM BY NADAV LAPID

QUINZAINÉ
DIRECTORS' FORTNIGHT
CANNES 2025



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QUINZAINE
DIRECTORS' FORTNIGHT
CANNES 2025

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NADAV LAPID

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KINO LORBER

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One of international cinema's most fearless and provocative filmmakers, Nadav Lapid has long been an outspoken critic of his birth country's government policies, channeling a lifetime of fury and frustration into vital films like *Synonyms* and *Ahed's Knee* that brim with righteous anger, spite, and shame. In *Yes*, Lapid once again takes vigorous critical aim at the Israeli government with a new approach: submission. In the days following October 7, Y., a jazz musician, and his wife Yasmin, a dancer, resolve to say yes to everything. Y. and Yasmin sell their bodies and souls to the highest bidder, surrendering themselves and their art to Israel's social, political and military elite. Soon, Y. is entrusted with a mission of the utmost importance: to compose the music for a rousing, ruthless new national anthem. Feverishly whirling between moments of satire, sincerity, and complete submission, *Yes* is a visceral, blistering indictment of modern Israel, and an essential addition to post-October 7 cinema.



INTERVIEW WITH NADAV LAPID

► Where did the desire to make a film about a musician who has decided to give himself body and soul to the rich and powerful, to entertain them in the hope of achieving wealth and glory come from?

The relationship between an individual and a community, or a country, is a theme of all my films. I am interested in the individual's capability to exist in the context of a group. It's important for an artist to try to understand the Zeitgeist. I had the sense that my previous film, *Ahed's Knee*, kind of took the scream, the refusal, the anger, the vehement discourse of opposition, as far as it could go. It's no coincidence that the film ended when the protagonist decided to stop all that and become good. I was wondering what it was like to be good today, in a world that is profoundly and increasingly bad.

► There's a line in *Yes* that says there are only two words: the "no" of refusal and resistance, and the "yes" of acceptance and giving up.

What I am talking about in the movie goes way

beyond the situation in Israel. I found that approaching the subject from the no perspective was somehow old-fashioned. The best way to speak of the power that prevails in the world is by being crushed by it. You bump up against the limits of the ant yelling at an elephant. Submission is currently the only truth. At one point in the film, Y. tells his son, "Give up as early as possible. Submission is happiness." My characters have widely explored the field of rage, protest and revolt. Here, it's the opposite. In my previous movies, there was the fantasy that, thanks to the poems of a child or the cries of a man, the gulf that exists between the world we inhabit and the world we should inhabit would be reduced or flattened. I wanted to believe it, even if I knew I would be disappointed. I always felt close to characters who banged into walls or closed doors. I am still obsessed by those doors, open or closed, but banging my head against them is over for me. It's become archaic. The way for me to talk about it today is to show someone who crawls to slip through the open door before it closes. I think that says more about the

truth of the world, the truth of the artist in the moment. Y. is my first passive lead character, in the sense that he accepts everything, gives himself unconditionally. It becomes very stimulating on a cinematic level. In his movements and gestures, he is as active as he can be. He never stops moving or dancing. But his willpower and desire have been sterilized.

► While describing a desperate situation, Yes resembles a cinematic gesture full of fury and poetry.

As long as you persist in handling a camera until you capture something that can transcend your subject matter, as long as you believe in the power of a filming object and a filmed object, you are necessarily seeking out beauty. It's a film that, formally, constantly tries to find small redemptions within a sort of a pretty sad reality.



► Is there an element of self-portrait in the character of Y.?

We are all now artists at the door of Y., even if a few rays of sunshine spare us from licking boots and ears. There is no pitying in the film. But I can only point out, as a director, that we are often reduced to Y.'s state. Y. is my first hero who, in some way, is not at all political. He understands nothing of the world around him, and doesn't try to understand it. Politics bores him. He wants to be in a musical comedy, not a political movie. The film drags him against his will in a political direction, because that's the state of things. Y. feels much more comfortable in the musical part. He feels at home there. Sadly for him, he needs money and has to go into the world, and into a political movie.

► October 7, 2023, Hamas launched a murderous attack against Israel, followed by numerous counter-attacks by the Israeli army in the Gaza Strip. To what extent was that historic event an upheaval in the making of your film, whose script was written in the previous spring?

I feel a bit like Y. since I didn't set out to make a movie that would be perceived as political. I was in Paris on October 7, and I was shocked, like many people, by what was happening in Israel. Beyond the event, since I'm a filmmaker, I wondered, after a few hours, what point there might be in making movies now, especially the one I was preparing about the condition of the





artist. It took a dozen days before I prudently began to reopen my computer and scrutinize the screenplay. The first line of the screenplay is still in the movie. It comes from the mouth of the chief of general staff, who goads Y. into a song battle. The second line is spoken by Yasmine, Y.'s wife, who tells him, "Let the chief of general staff win." For me, those two lines are linked to the October 7 attacks. The comprehensive defeat inflicted on the army was one of the main reasons for the revenge that followed. October 7 had not yet taken place, but the state of Israel was not so different. The original screenplay underwent amendments without being completely transformed. I come from a country where life and death are part of daily life. It might be what distinguishes an Israeli director from a French director. An Israeli director can escape neither the state, nor the politics of his country. You can hide all you want but the country will come to find you.

► **By agreeing to compose a patriotic anthem, Y. becomes an agent of Israeli propaganda.**

I like the idea that Y.'s act of war toward Gaza boils down to composing a tune. While aviation and artillery bombard Gaza, Y. launches notes of music. Two weeks after October 7, I went back to Israel to try to understand what was going on. I met and listened to a lot of people: friends, acquaintances, rock singers, filmmakers. Everybody, in their own way, was working for the war, with songs and videos. It became the great



common cause. Artists were also at war. Art in Israel has chosen its path.

► **In the background, the Star of David and Israeli flag are omnipresent. How much of that is exaggeration?**

It is rigorously a reflection of today's reality. There was, in the project, a potential that became actual. The country was already pretty frontal, but nuance has collapsed. Ambiguity has no place anymore.

► **There are numerous song-and-dance scenes in the movie.**

I tend to present the film as a musical tragedy. In all my previous movies, there was a dichotomy between word and movement. With this movie, I wanted to create a character who does not really use words. My



faith in words has run out. For Y., likewise. As a musician, he composes but he does not write the words. Being removed from verbal expression allows him to duck, to hide behind dance and music. When he is asked a question, by way of an answer he dances. In multiple films, the king's fool says the truth in song-and-dance. The singing and dancing then constitute an alternate path to the truth when words are forbidden. Y.'s songs and dances, however, key into the violence of words

and weapons. Even so, I don't think the film points an accusing finger at Y. There is, at the end of the film, the notion of leaving and the notion of love. There's a desire to escape it all, even if it might only be a temporary solution.

► In a happy moment, Jasmine and Y.'s hands converse, and are filmed instead of their faces. Your film demonstrates the desire to exploit every part of the body, and to confer great expressivity on them.

I am fascinated by parts of the body that are less often filmed than others. In cinema history, there has been discrimination against certain parts of the body.

► Mouths play an essential role in *Yes*. Singing and kissing, of course, as well as licking, devouring, ingurgitating, vomiting... The mouth's importance underlines the voracity of Y. and Yasmine, their craving for money and success, which elicits a measure of disgust.

It's a film where the mouth says little, unlike *Synonyms* or *Ahed's Knee*. It is busy doing other things. It has no more words but it has remained very active.

► The mouth is linked to the obsession with food that runs through the film. You divert food from its primary function: nourishment. The frenetic ingestion of food is associated here with notions



of obscenity, filth and prostitution. What is fundamentally natural becomes contrary to nature in the film.

Food in the film constitutes a form of permanent humiliation for those who consume it. Either you talk, or you lick and stuff your face.

► In the opening scene, a decadent party for the ultra-rich, you explicitly cite the George Grosz

painting *The Pillars of Society*. Throughout the film, you use the camera like a brush, with the temptation of visual abstraction in several scenes. Were you inspired by futurism, Dada, expressionism, or other artistic movements?

Yes, enormously. I'm fascinated by the impressionist project of not drawing the car but the emotion the car leaves as it passes by. Or the work of Jackson Pollock, who assaults the canvas with brushes to conjugate

chance and creation, and free the creative gesture from thought. I find that challenge a thousand times more interesting, and greater, with a camera, which is basically an extremely sterile tool, and extremely faithful to reality. You have to let the chaos of the world into the film. The danger of films that are too slick and too precise is that in the end they only talk about themselves, and fail to talk about the world around them. I like the proverb that says that when you dance, you feel the world dancing with you. I tried in my film to take that literally, and it's far easier said than filmed.

► How did you choose the songs and music in the film, Elvis Presley's *Love Me Tender*, for example?

I believe each scene of a film must encapsulate the film as a whole and all the central tensions that make up the movie. Particularly, the opening scene. The party that opens the film ends with a song battle with the pillars of society led by the chief of the general staff, who hollers *Love Me Tender*, a love song, deformed by collective folly, as if it were a war song. The couple resists at first but soon gives in. By surrendering, they reconstitute *Love Me Tender's* dimension as song of absolute love. I liked the idea of taking a song like *Love Me Tender*, subverting it and then "reverting" it. All the film's themes—group folly that ruins love, tension between the private and the collective—are there in that scene, and that is conveyed in the music. I also liked



the idea of having the chief of general staff singing Elvis. If there were an army of singers, Elvis could have been the chief of general staff with his bizarre virility that I associate with Israeli militarist virility.

► What can you tell us about the propaganda music video that screens at the end of the film?

I made nothing up. A few weeks after the October



7 attacks and the start of the war in Gaza, strategic consultants met to come up with all sorts of initiatives to boost morale in the country. That's how they took a legendary Israeli song written around the time the country came into being, and put a new twist on the lyrics to turn it into a hymn to vengeance and killing. They also filmed a children's choir singing the song. To some extent, the film is also the story of the creation

of a song. The horrific lyrics that Y. sets to music are for real. They are not the fruit of my imagination.

► Y. has a conflictual relationship with his deceased mother, to whom he speaks while looking up to heaven, and who occasionally expresses her disapproval.

The only tender moments in *Ahed's Knee* came when the protagonist talked to his sick mother. In *Yes*, Y.'s mother represents the conscience and morality that is to be silenced, but which still manages to threaten to capsize the nationalists' boat trip of pleasure and stupidity, or brings rocks raining down on Y. after he has spat out his tune at the bombed city of Gaza. These interventions give the movie a mystical dimension.

► How would you describe the character of Yasmine, Y.'s partner?

They dance together, have fun together and turn tricks together. But I think that for Yasmine prostitution is a tool, while for Y. it becomes an existential state. Y. becomes hooked on submission. The only thing he is capable of saying is yes. Unlike him, Yasmine is a fighter.

► The film contains some surprising special effects.

We live in a very technological world. There is a mix in the film of futuristic technologies, such as the propagandist-in-chief whose head morphs into

a screen, and very primitive things, such as when he headbutts a phone to hammer out messages. That expresses the time-lapse between total dehumanization and a kind of simplicity that is still there. It also reinforces the aspect of the film as fable or legend. You meet mythological characters, like the Russian who is the world's richest man, someone who transcends the rules of nature. He is capable of making a skyscraper spring up in the desert in a matter of seconds, but he does it with the help of a rotten remote control. That tension in the film is there once more. I regret that most movies today are more

well-behaved than real life. When you go on Google or a news website, or even when you look around you in the street, you witness events that are much crazier and more worrying than anything in a feature film.

► **The second part of the film, in the wilderness, presents an introspective journey not only in space but also in time, evoking issues of remembrance and imagination.**

The first part is full-on exuberance. Everything is excessive. It's too colorful, too loud, too danced, too trashy. It also speaks to a blindness in the face of reality.

You sense a kind of evident perversion. The second part is, on the face of it, more noble and sedate, with real conversations. At the same time, it shows a reality where the intimate does not exist. What is the point of intimacy in wartime, while Gaza is being bombed? The former lovers may well reminisce about their youth and their emotions, but they are completely consumed by the current situation. To kiss with Gaza burning in the background is to be both Israeli and a citizen of the world. To my mind, the second part is no healthier than the first. It just offers a very different presentation, in its form and female characters, of the dehumanization of the world. Declarations of love and kisses become derisory, annihilating themselves and perverting themselves when faced with the horror of war. Leaving the city and heading into the wild is no way out. It's the familiar theme of an artist on a quest, setting out on an existential journey to find inspiration and bring their work into the world. Here, that inspiration is the worst imaginable.

► **Who are the actors playing Y. and Yasmine?**

Ariel Bronz was not exactly an actor before he was in my film. He's a creator of very radical and provocative avant-garde shows. He is absolutely superb. When I met him, he confessed that he had always dreamed of acting in a mainstream movie or TV series. I was moved by his simple desire to be "normal." In Israel, cinema is dying out and actors are often forced to



participate in stupid projects just to make ends meet. Anything alternative has become a tiny niche. Y. can lick all the boots he wants, I doubt he will achieve his ends. He is too strange for that. He is struck by the curse of singularity. Efrat Dor is the polar opposite of Ariel Bronz. She is the Actress. She starred in a hit TV series in Israel. When she was younger, her dream was to make it big in America. She spent eleven years in Los Angeles, but her plans for an international career never came to fruition. When you see Ariel and Efrat together, you very quickly identify their similarities and differences, which also exist in the film. Naama Preis, who plays Lea, would also have been a perfect Yasmine, but I was more interested in seeing her play the role of Y.'s former lover, a woman of words, not body. She is the only character in the film who really talks.



► **What was it like shooting in a country at war?**

For the first time in my life, numerous technicians refused to work on the film, on the basis of its subject matter, and partly because of me. Every day, another crew member walked off set. I had some very lively discussions with people who explained why they didn't want to be part of the project. We had to hire a Serbian key makeup artist because we discovered that all the makeup artists in Israel are very patriotic. It occurred to me that I hadn't changed, but reality had shifted in the country. Same thing with actors who initially were very keen to be in the movie. Their agents called us to say they had changed their minds with curious explanations. It was shocking. It plunged us into a state close to paranoia. When we were shooting in Cyprus, the war with Lebanon broke out. We had to cut

short the shoot. Shooting a film in the middle of a war posed multiple problems for the production team, and increased the cost of the movie. When we were filming within view of Gaza, with the huge plume of black smoke, the soundtrack was full of real-life explosions. When you film a kiss on a hillside overlooking Gaza, you wonder how many people will be dead by the end of the shoot. The father of one of the crew members was a hostage murdered by Hamas. And another told us his soldier son was bombing Gaza. When we shot the scene on the famous "Hill of Love," on a day when there were a lot of explosions, we went gonzo with a very small crew, because we were in a forbidden military zone. The army intervened and asked us to stop filming. Fortunately, we came across an amenable and interested young officer, who struck up a conversation about cinema with the crew, and gave us permission to shoot for six hours. ■

NADAV LAPID IN CONVERSATION WITH OLIVIER PÈRE, MAY 3, 2025





CREW

Directed and written by **Nadav Lapid** • Direction of photography **Shai Goldman** • Editing **Nili Feller** • Sound **Moti Hefetz, Aviv Aldema, Adrian Baumeister** • Production design **Pascale Consigny** • Costumes **Sandra Berrebi** • Hair & make up **Branislav Nikic** • Casting **Orit Azoulay, Prague Benbenisty** • Grading **Isabelle Julien** • VFX supervisor **Cédric Fayolle** • Post-production supervisor **Maxime Even** • Line producing **Thomas Paturel** • Line producing - Israel **Zehava Shekel** • Line producing - Cyprus **Marios Piperides** • First assistant director **Dima Konoplov** • Script supervisor **Rona Cohen** • Music rights supervision **Martin Hossbach** • Piano by **Sleeping Giant** with the participation of **Omer Klein** • Producers **Les Films du Bal (Judith Lou Lévy), Chi-Fou-Mi Productions (Hugo Sélignac & Antoine Lafon)** Coproduction **Bustan Films (Thomas Alfandari - Israel), AMP Filmworks (Janine Teerling, Marios Piperides - Cyprus), Komplizen Film (Janine Jackowski, Jonas Dornbach, Maren Ade - Germany), Arte France Cinéma, ZDF/Arte, Trésor Films (Alain Attal - France)** • With the participation of **Arte France** • With the support of the **Israel Film Fund, Ministry of Culture and Sports, Israel Film Council, Eurimages – Council of Europe, Cyprus Deputy Ministry of Culture, Cyprus Film Commission, Medienboard Berlin-Brandenburg, La Région Bretagne** in partnership with the **CNC, Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée** • In association with **240 Films, Cinemage 18 Développement, ALBI Film and Television Fund** • International sales & French distribution **Les Films du Losange**



CAST

Y. **Ariel Bronz**
Jasmine **Efrat Dor**
Leah **Naama Preis**
Big Billionaire **Alexey Serebryakov**
Avinoam **Sharon Alexander**
Big Billionaire Secretary **Pablo Pillaud Vivien**
Rich Woman **Idit Teperson**
Singing Yacht Attendant **Shira Shaish**



NADAV LAPID

Born in 1975 in Tel Aviv, Nadav Lapid directed three short films, published a novel and worked as a literary critic and sports journalist, before joining the Cannes Film Festival's Cinéfondation in 2007, where he wrote the screenplay of his first feature film, *Policeman*. Since, he has been awarded in the most prestigious festivals with the Jury Prize at Locarno in 2011 for *Policeman*, a selection at Cannes Critics' Week for *The Kindergarten Teacher*, the Golden Bear of the Berlinale in 2019 for *Synonyms* and the Jury Prize of the Cannes Film Festival in 2021 for *Ahed's Knee*. *Yes* is his fifth feature film. ■

2025 - **Yes** (feature) - Cannes Festival, Directors' Fortnight

2021 - **Ahed's Knee** (feature) - Cannes Festival, Official Selection, Jury Prize

2021 - **The Star** (short) - Cannes Festival, Official Selection

2019 - **Synonyms** (feature) - Berlin Festival, Golden Bear

2016 - **From the diary of a wedding photographer** (medium-length film)
Cannes Festival, Critics' Week

2015 - **Why?** (short)

2014 - **The Kindergarten Teacher** (feature) - Cannes Festival, Critics' Week

2014 - **Ammunition Hill** (short)

2011 - **Policeman** (feature) - Locarno Festival, Jury Prize

2007 - **Émile's Girlfriend** (medium-length film)

2005 - **Kvish** (short)

2004 - **Protect Gvul** (short)

