



# USHPIZIN

## Media Information Kit



**Running Time: 90 Minutes**

**MEDIA ENQUIRIES:**

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## **Synopsis**

Jerusalem. Moshe and Mali, a poor childless Orthodox couple, find themselves penniless on the eve of the Jewish holy day of Succoth.

As they both pray desperately to the Lord to help them, the impossible happens. Their prayers are heard and they receive an unexpected charitable donation. However, a miracle doesn't come without a test, as two escaped convicts appear uninvited on the couple's doorstep, friends from Moshe's shady secular past. Moshe and Mali believe it is another sign and that God will bless them with children if they follow the religious custom of receiving guests for the holy day (Ushpizin). They perceive the convicts as messengers, but God works in mysterious ways. The outrageous behavior of these unholy messengers and the havoc it brings to the Orthodox community will put Moshe and Mali's faith to the ultimate test.

## **Short Synopsis**

Moshe and Mali are a poor and barren orthodox couple living in Jerusalem. On the Jewish Holy day of Succoth they receive unexpected guests: two escaped convicts, friends of Moshe from his shady secular past. Moshe and Mai believe that their guests were sent to them by God as a test of faith...

## **Main Cast**

Shalom Rand - Moshe

Michal Bat Sheva Rand - Mali

Shaul Mizrahi - Eliahu

Ilan Ganani - Yosef

## **Supporting Actors**

Avraham Abutbul – Ben Baruch

Yonathan Danino – Gabai

Daniel Dayan – The Rabi

Michael Vaigel - Ethrog assessor

Daniel Rand - Elazar

Yizhak Levkovits - Charity

Shmuel Ovadia - Wolf

## **Credits**

Director – Gidi Dar

Screenplay – Shalom Rand

Producers – Rafi Bukae, Gidi Dar

Photographer – Amit Yasur

Art Director – Ido Dollev

Editors - Isaac Sehayek / Nadav Harel

Music – Nethaniel Mechaly

Sound Designer & Mix – Chen Harpaz

Line Producer – Shlomit Smadja / Gadi Levi / Ziv Ben Zvi

## **About the film**

Shalom Rand was Israel's leading film and stage actor (starring in Asi Dayan's "Life According to Agfa," and Rina Yerushalmi's "Hamlet," among other roles) until he became religious and disappeared from the public eye. Now, nine years later, he is returning to the screen in a unique collaboration with secular director Gidi Dar, with whom he made two films in the past ("Eddie King," Locarno Festival, '92, "The Poet" '88).

Never before had the Haredi community been filmed as it truly is. All the actors and extras are from the Orthodox religious community and did not alter their appearance in any way for the filming. The locations are real: the most isolated neighborhoods in Jerusalem, where film crews had never been allowed. Furthermore, all the films in the past that dealt with the subject of the Haredi were done from an outsiders' perspective (Amos Gitai's "Kadosh," Boaz Yekin's "A Price Above Rubies"). "Ushpizin," however, was the first film to be done from the inside. It shows the Haredi way of life and world view in the most authentic possible way, as they, themselves, experience it.

Despite the fact that the director is totally secular, he succeeded, with the help of Shalom Rand, to gain the trust of a number of Rabbis, who gave the film their blessing and allowed it to be made. There were many restrictions, such as the lead actor not being allowed to film alongside any woman other than his wife, despite the fact that she is not a professional actress. There were commitments not to do any production work on the Sabbath, nor to screen the film in Israel on the Sabbath, and so on. Despite all the restrictions, the film won both critical acclaim and commercial success. It won the Critics Prize for best Israeli film, alongside "Dogville," that won the prize for best foreign film. It also won the Israeli Film Academy Award for Best Actor.

The film deals with the reality of 'coming back to the faith' (Hozer Be'tshuva), a phenomenon that has grown both in Israel and around the world. The main character is a small-time criminal who became religious, and his relationship with the past that continues to follow him.

Ushpizin (The Guests)

## **On Succoth**

When the Children of Israel left Egypt, the Lord commanded them to stay in Succoth- temporary wood dwellings. Since then, each year, as a reminder of the miracles that happened to them during the Exodus, the Children of Israel are commanded to leave their homes and dwell for seven days in a Succah. They are also commanded to make blessings on four species: date-palm branches, myrtle, willow, and citron.

## **About the Actors**

### **Shalom Rand**

Born in 1962.  
Graduated from Nisan Nativ Acting Studio.

One of the most prominent actors of Israeli theatre.  
Participated in many plays, among which:  
Habima Theatre- The Dybbuk, Of Mice and Men.  
The Cameri Theatre: Angels in America, Richard III, Hamlet.  
Movies: Life According to Agfa, The Appointed, Newland, Eddie King, Marco Polo.

#### **Awards:**

Meir Margalit Award, 1987 (Hamlet)  
The Israeli Film Academy Award, 1992 (Life According to Agfa)  
Actor of the Year in Theatre, 1995 (Mouth Open, Pollard)  
The Golden Cylinder Award, 1995 (Shakespeare, What's That?)

In 1996 he returned to Judaism and moved to Jerusalem.  
In the year 2000 he returned to acting, performing in the one-man show "Yahr Zeit", an adaptation to "A Tale of Two Scholars from Our Town", a story by S.Y. Agnon.

The play won the award for Best Fringe Play of the Year 2000 and the Meir Margalit Award.

In 2004 the movie "Ushpizin" was released. Rand wrote the movie's script, and also won the award of Best Actor of the Year 2004 from the Israeli Film Academy and from the Critics Association on his performance in the movie.  
During that year he established The Jewish Theatre of Jerusalem with Michal Rand.

### **Michal Bat Sheva Rand**

Born in 1962.  
Graduated from Rimon Music Academy.  
In 1996 she returned to Judaism.

In 1999 worked with Shalom Rand on the adaptation of the play "The Prince and the Maidservant's Son", based on a story by Rabbi Nahman of Braslev.

In 2000, she co-directed with Shalom the play "Yahr Zeit". In 2003 Michal directed "Queen of Joy", a children's play based on "Trust In God", a story by Rabbi Nahman of Braslev. In 2004 played in the movie "Ushpizin", in the role of Mali, and also established with Shalom Rand The Jewish Theatre of Jerusalem.

### **Ilan Ganani**

Born in 1971.

Graduated from Nisan Nativ Acting Studio, Jerusalem, 1997.

Participated in many theatrical plays, also wrote the play "Toads".

Played both dramatic and comic roles in television.

Movies:

Freeing the Preincess, 1998.

Electricity Man, 2000.

Sima Vakin – A Witch, 2002.

Ushpizin, 2004.

### **Shaul Mizrahi**

Born in 1958 in Tel Aviv.

Graduated from Nisan Nativ Acting Studio, 1983.

An actor of Habima, The Haifa Municipal and Bet Lessin theatres.

Some of the movies he played in: "Ricochets", "One of Us", "Dogs Are Color Blind", "Zohar". On his performance as Zohar Argov he won the award of Best Actor of the Year 1993 from the Israeli Film Academy.

In addition to acting he is also a director and a teacher.

### **The late Rafi Bukae (producer)**

Born on January 5<sup>th</sup>, 1957, in Tel Aviv. Grew up in Kiryat Gat.

After his early release from the army as a result of lymphoma cancer he went on to manage his parents' movie theatre in Kiryat Gat.

Later on he began his studies in the department of film and television in the University of Tel Aviv, and graduated with honor in 1984.

“Avanti Popolo”, 1986 – His first film, which he wrote, produced and directed. The film won the Locarno International Film Festival - the Golden Leopard Award, and is considered one of the most important films ever made in Israel.

“The Jews’ Fear”, “Passover”, 1991 – These two dramas were written by Shmuel Hasfari and were co-produced by Rafi Bukae and Yoram Kislev. “The Jews’ Fear” was directed by Rafi Bukae.

“Life According to Agfa”, 1992 - Produced by Rafi Bukae and Yoram Kislev.

“Eddie King”, 1992 – Directed by Gidi Dar. Co-produced by Rafi Bukae.

“Marko Polo”, 1996 – Written, produced and directed by Rafi Bukae.

“Mondial”, 2000 - Produced by Rafi Bukae, written and directed by Ariel Telpalar.

“One Small Step for Man”, 2003 – Written by Guy Meirson, directed by Shahar Segal, produced by Rafi Bukae.

“Ushpizin”, 2003/4 – Co-produced by Rafi Bukae. During the making of the movie Rafi Bukae passed away as a result of lung cancer.

The movie is now dedicated in memory of Rafi.

In his last years Rafi was also a teacher in the department of film and communication in Beit Berl College and in the department of film and television in the University of Tel Aviv.

## **Director's statement**

**By**  
**Gidi Dar**

I did two films with Shuli in the past. He was the best actor I worked with. Then he became an ultra orthodox with the beard and the hat and the black and white clothes, and left the business. Eight years later I suggested to him that we should do another movie. As we developed the story, it became clear to me that this film will be different.

I had to take a deep dive into the ultra orthodox experience, accept it for a while and even part of its rules (as to what concerns the film). I agreed to this because I knew this is the only way I could have a good look into the very inside of this world, to which no camera ever entered. An isolated world that lives by the rules of the Tora, revolving around the work of God.

My job was not to criticize them, but to tell a story about faith and a little test, that will show authentically the unique way my heroes see their lives. The lives of the believers the way they see themselves.

Born 1964 Haifa Israel

Films:

- 1988 The Poet – 30min fiction with Shalom Rand, Moshe Ivgi
- 1992 Eddie King – 90 min fiction Shalom Rand, Ronit Elkabets, Eithan Bloom. Locarno film fest 92
- 1998 Blue & Green, Music video.
- 1999 Shine, Documentay. Berlin film fest 2000, DOCFEST NY 2000
- 2000 The Last Wilderness, Documentary
- 2001 The Kids from Napoleon Hill. TV fiction series, Israeli academy award
- 2002 The Kids from Napoleon Hill. TV fiction series, Part 2, Israeli academy award
- 2004 Ushpizin, Fiction, 90 min, Shalom Rand, Michal Bat Sheva Rand, Shaul Mizrahi, Ilan Gannani