

# VARIETY

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## *Film Review: 'Peace After Marriage'*



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*A Palestinian-American and an Israeli find themselves in a green-card marriage in this appealing, lighthearted Muslim-Jewish romantic comedy.*

*Jay Weissberg*

A Palestinian in Brooklyn agrees to bargain his U.S. citizenship into a green-card marriage, never expecting to wed an Israeli, in [Ghazi Albuliwi](#)'s amusing indie laffer "[Peace After Marriage](#)." Co-helmed with [Bandar Albuliwi](#), this echt-Gotham ethnic comedy, originally titled "Only in New York," has obvious origins in Ghazi Albuliwi's standup roots, and while individual lines are generally punchier than the whole, it's refreshing to see a lighthearted Muslim-Jewish romantic comedy without a heavy political agenda. The audience award at Montpellier's Cinemed Fest gives a good indication of the pic's appeal; targeted bicoastal theatrical play could follow rotation among smaller fests.

Arafat (Ghazi Albuliwi), 30, is a struggling actor living with his parents and suffering from a major case of sexual frustration. With no pickup technique to speak of, he's stuck with porn and an overfamiliarity with his right hand. Dad (Hany Kamal) keeps proposing arranged marriages in New York and Palestine, but the candidates never get his sense of humor, and he ends up fleeing. Mom (Hiam Abbass) is sympathetic, but the father is the king of the house, and surely a nice Muslim girl would be the answer to everyone's prayers.

Hoping for relief from his porn obsession, Arafat joins a support group for sexual compulsives and is taken under wing by Kenny (Mark Lucaj), who offers advice on how to get laid. Not much is working until Kenny comes up with an idea: Since Arafat is American, why not marry a woman who needs a green card? Convinced the scheme will get him money and sex, Arafat agrees, even after learning that his bride-to-be, Michaela (Einat Tubi), is a prickly Israeli.

The pic's early passages suffer from a lack of focus, peppered with funny lines but feeling as though the Albuliwis were trying out skits on a test audience. But "Peace After Marriage" really comes together at this point, playing off clashing cultural suppositions while tying them to the romance element; if the yuks aren't always smoothly integrated into the dialogue, the rhythm of the film nonetheless improves as characterization comes into play.

Arafat's bedroom at home, decorated with movie memorabilia (including a poster from "Annie Hall" and a still from Chaplin's "The Gold Rush"), pretty much encapsulates Ghazi Albuliwi's influences, with the addition of early-'70s screwball capers. From the clever opening credits, paying homage to Henry Mancini and "The Pink Panther," to scenes on the streets of Manhattan that inescapably recall early-to-middle-period Woody Allen, "Peace After Marriage" wears its influences conspicuously, and though some scenes feel cartoonish or derivative, they're enlivened by laugh-out-

loud one-liners. Signaling Arafat's acting ambitions before suddenly throwing him into an audition would have cleared up some confusion, but his tryout with a Palestinian terrorist puppet gives the pic a small, necessary jolt into the more complex issues involved.

Lensing is done in a straightforward indie style, breezily informal and suited to the material; sharper editing would give more breathing room to good lines that get lost too quickly. Music reinforces the Allen-esque feel, down to the New Orleans jazz at the end.

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## **Film Review: 'Peace After Marriage'**

Reviewed at Abu Dhabi Film Festival (Showcase), Oct. 31, 2013. Running time: **85 MIN.**

### **Production**

(U.S.-France-Turkey) A Hostage Intl. production in association with Good Lap Prod., ABT Istanbul. (International sales: Wide Management, Paris.) Produced by Faruk Ozerten, Alain Peyrollaz, Philippe Akoka, Hiam Abbass. Executive producer, Arin Cetin.

### **Crew**

Directed, written by Ghazi Albuliwi. Co-director, Bandar Albuliwi. Camera (color, HD), Ahmet Sesigurgil; editors, Guy Lecorne, Michael Phelippeau; music, Mark Durst; production designer, Nell Tivnan; art director, Meghan Moreland; costume designer, Yaneya Rovira; sound, Stu Deutsch, Mike Snyder; line producers, Tomas "Dutch" Dekaj, Ibrahim Abdelhaq.

### **With**

Ghazi Albuliwi, Hiam Abbass, Einat Tubi, Mark Lucaj, Hany Kamal, Omer Barnea, Rachel Feinstein, Thom Bishops, Assaf Cohen. (English, Arabic, Hebrew dialogue)

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