



presents

# Aliyah

A film by Elie Wajeman

**A subtly effective drama-cum thriller from budding auteur Elie Wajeman-Jordan Mintzer, *Hollywood Reporter***

**"Cleverly cinematic! [An] intimate and dexterous debut feature." - Boyd Van Hoeij, *Variety***



**Narrative Feature / France / 88min / Drama / French-Hebrew**

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## **SYNOPSIS**

Alex, twenty seven, lives in a working-class Paris neighborhood and sells drugs for a living, continuously paying off the debts of his brother Isaac (played by French auteur Cedric Kahn), who's becoming a real burden. When his cousin, who has just returned from completing his military service in Israel, tells him he's opening a restaurant in Tel Aviv, Alex thinks that joining him might be the life-changing opportunity he was waiting for. But in order to leave, Alex must quickly find enough money and accomplish his "aliyah" (the term for Jews emigrating to Israel) which involves, among other things, Hebrew lessons and connecting with his Jewish roots. He also has to leave behind his beloved city of Paris, his former lover Esther, his lifelong friend Mathias, and Jeanne, a woman whom he's just met but has the potential of becoming someone important in his life. Torn between making his aliyah, his drug selling, his complicated love life and a destructive brother, Alex will have to find his own way and make a final decision.

## **SHORT SYNOPSIS**

Alex, a young Parisian drug dealer, always pays off the debts of his troublesome older brother Isaac. When his cousin says he's opening a restaurant in Tel Aviv, Alex jumps at the chance for a new beginning and asks to join. But first he must raise his share of the initial funds, and also make "aliyah," the immigration of Diaspora Jews to Israel. Beyond the red tape, this involves something he never cared about: connecting with his Jewish roots. Alex must also face leaving behind the city he loves, as well as the new entrancing woman that has suddenly fallen into his life. Torn between his aliyah, dealing, his complicated love life, and destructive brother, Alex must find his own way out.

## **LOGLINE**

Alex is determined to leave his drug-dealing past behind him for a fresh start in Israel. It just may not be that easy.

## FESTIVALS AND AWARDS

**CANNES** Film Festival (Director's Fortnight)

**WINNER** – Audience Award for screenplay, **Angers Film Festival**

**OFFICIAL SELECTION** – New York Jewish Film Festival

**OFFICIAL SELECTION** – Philadelphia Film Festival

**OFFICIAL SELECTION** – Miami Jewish Film Festival

**OFFICIAL SELECTION** – Atlanta Jewish Film Festival

**OFFICIAL SELECTION** – Sarasota Film Festival

**OFFICIAL SELECTION** – Cleveland International Film Festival

**OFFICIAL SELECTION** – Toronto Jewish Film Festival

**OFFICIAL SELECTION** – Sacramento Jewish Film Festival



## INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR ELIE WAJEMAN



In *ALIYAH*, Alex is a Parisian drug dealer who wishes to stop, but eventually ends up going deeper into it to make enough money to start anew in Tel Aviv and escape his burdensome brother. The film has a novelistic and original feel to it, and it combines many themes and film genres.

It is at once a thriller, a film about family, about a new beginning (in Israel) and about feelings, either between brothers, friends or lovers. This mixture of genres is deliberate. It

strengthens the subject.

### **How did the character of Alex come about?**

Initially, I wanted to tell the story of a drug dealer in Paris, with thus a dangerous if petty bourgeois lifestyle. I had Spike Lee's *25TH Hour* in mind, a great film about America, based on the beautiful idea that this country was founded by people from all around the world, often on the lam. Then I discovered aliyah, that is to say when a Jew from the Diaspora immigrates to Israel. I looked into that, and by reading a lot about it, making a trip to Israel and meeting people, I understood that many people who make aliyah don't do it because of ideology or religion, but simply to run away – from troubles, sorrows, disappointments, or sometimes from the law. It's as simple as that.

### **On Israel as a getaway land...**

I heard so many stories about that, "So-and-so was an addict in Paris before moving there; this other person went there to find love after being dumped. These parents sent their son there, a thirty-something who was doing nothing with his life." Once in Israel, things don't necessarily get better, I know, even more so because it is a tough place to live. But I find all those departures really touching. So I imagined Alex making that move.

### **You portray Alex as being a really strong-minded character.**

Yes, he is compelled to leave his brother behind and make a fresh start for himself. By leaving the ever-fluctuating man that he is, he finally takes hold of his own destiny. He takes a decision and stands by it. Alex reminds me of the "lines of flight" Gilles Deleuze talks about in his "Dialogues" with Claire Parnet. To him, fleeing – at least in the Anglo-Saxon literature he is

discussing – is an active and positive thing. In fact, by fleeing, one could build a whole world. “Fleeing is drawing a line, several lines, a whole map.” Still, of course, one might find it odd that this guy should flee from his problem to a country which is even more problematic and that could crumble any time. I like this ambiguity.

**In the part of the film set in Israel, you show a remarkably mixed society.**

In Tel Aviv, you can meet people from Russia, Palestine, Sub-Saharan Africa, Thailand, you name it. A few photographers have given an account of this intermingling, so did Claude Lanzmann in *ISRAEL, WHY*, which clearly shows Israel’s diversity. In the last shots of the film, I wanted to capture this Israeli melting pot. To show all these exiles.

**Let’s get back to the “aliyah” in the title. In the film, we discover the strange world of the Jewish agency, the organization which coordinates departures to Israel. You don’t show it in a very favorable light.**

It is true that the agency isn’t really welcoming. I had to pretend I was an aliyah candidate in order to enter the premises, which are guarded like an embassy. I went there several times, and I was always amazed by the security measures that don’t really make you want to move there.

**Then who are the aliyah “candidates”?**

The first time I went to the Jewish agency for research, there was this thuggish character standing before me on the line with his girlfriend. His ID had been stolen, so he came to the agency with a report of theft. At the reception, he was told that he couldn’t enter the agency with such a document. He got mad, “But I need to get to Israel right fucking now! My trial starts in two weeks!” I thought, “The story of an outlaw who moves to Israel, it’s not too bad!” But I didn’t want Alex, my hero, to have the police on his heels or to commit a murder. He had to leave for more intimate reasons.

**When Esther (Sarah Le Picard), Alex’s former lover, hears of his plan to leave she says, “But we agreed, didn’t we? We said we were Jews, right, but in Paris, that we were Parisians, and that there was not a damn reason for us to go there.”**

And he answers: “It’s a messed-up country, just like me.” This is exactly what I wanted to say. I know the film is bound to spark off reactions. Will I be criticized for showing Israel as a solution to Alex’s problems? Or will people be outraged about Alex dealing cocaine to leave to “the Holy Land”? We’ll see.

**You also have a particular way to show the rituals of Judaism. The**

**Shabbat scene, for instance, is quite laid-back.**

My characters have an unusual approach to Judaism. They have made it their own and have made some adjustments. To them, Shabbat is more an opportunity to get together than a religious act. Incidentally, Esther says that they are “bad Jews”. Throughout the film, religion is treated with humor, which is a Jewish tradition in a way. When writing this scene, I thought of TWO LOVERS by James Gray. In his film, the characters are really Jewish, but it is not what the film is about.

**Indeed, many of your characters are Jewish, they talk about Israel, but the originality of the film lies in the fact that it is not about “the community”.**

This is exactly what I had in mind. Setting “universal” love stories in a precise context. But I’m interested in feelings, not in the community. ALIYAH is first and foremost the story of a young man searching for “some place else”. I am not a specialist in Judaism. I barely know Israel – I have no relatives there, my family is spread between France and the United States.

**Brotherhood is another topic in the film.**

At the Femis Film School, in the screenplay section, I worked on the theme of Cain and Abel, also with “The Brothers Karamazov” in mind. Since I didn’t have a brother, I chose to deal with brotherhood as a love story. Alex cannot seem to tell Isaac, the love of his life, that he wants to leave him. And the whole story of the film is that of their break-up, somehow.

**Alex also suffers from the indifference of his father and the death of his mother.**

Gaëlle Macé and I wanted him to be deeply wounded. And we wanted the audience to discover the causes of his wounds as the film went on. Then the scene with his very unloving father became pivotal. Besides, Alex doesn’t say: “I want to leave”, but “Nobody is asking me to stay, not even my father.” He is really alone in the world.

**Pio Marmai portrays Alex, the young hero, with much subtlety.**

Pio is deeply moving in the film. He is a really physical actor, and Alex needed this direct strength so that he could collapse later on. Pio is of Italian descent, and it is a kind of “tradition” in American cinema to have an Italian actor play a Jewish character. Just think of Pacino, or De Niro in ONCE UPON A TIME IN AMERICA by Sergio Leone, or THE LAST TYCOON by Elia Kazan. This idea appealed to me.

**For the part of Isaac, you chose director Cédric Kahn, who appears for the first time in front of the camera.**

Cédric was my teacher at the Femis film school, then my godfather at the Emergence international summer film class, where I had the chance to spend three weeks. I liked the screenplay and he trusted me. To play the brother, I needed someone who has absolute charm, to whom you just can't say no, Cédric has this strength.

He had only appeared once in *N'oublie Pas Que Tu Vas Mourir* by Xavier Beauvois. Cédric insisted on making a screen-test, and let me direct him. But then again, he was a wild animal. It was beautiful for me to see him turn into an actor. You wouldn't believe how elated he was to play Isaac. In fact, he is a natural born actor.

**There are many fresh faces in ALIYAH: Adèle Haenel, already a bit famous, but also Guillaume Gouix, Sarah Le Picard...**

It was important for the film. I'm very much inspired by French cinema from the 1990s, which saw the advent of a new generation of actors. Some films by Arnaud Desplechin, Noémie Lvovsky, Eric Rochant or Olivier Assayas made me want to become a director. But this is 2012, not 1995. Since ALIYAH is a novelistic, actually quite classic tale, I had to choose modern-day actors to provide the film with a sense of modernity. This is what I tried to do with casting directors Sarah Teper and Leila Fournier.

**Indeed Adèle Haenel brings on a really modern lover figure. She never judges Alex, she is practical, willful, and sometimes tough.**

Adèle took her character out of the screenplay and gave it more substance. She gave her strength and deep emotion. She is an actress whose childhood still shows on the surface. I find it really beautiful the way she combines resoluteness with frailty. Just like the way Sarah Le Picard combines wit with high sensitivity. I am fond of fearless actresses.

**The departure scene, when she sums up their impossible relationship by sketching a diagram on a restaurant table, is terrific.**

The scene allowed me to synthesize all the issues (brother, ex-girlfriend, drug dealing, sex, new girlfriend) Alex too is burdened with, and which finally draw him to this "unity" his escape stands for. And it is also a moment one would like to experience in real life, which is why I write films.

**Alex's best friend, Mathias, played by Guillaume Gouix, is a particularly moving role.**

In a single scene, on the parking lot, I wanted Mathias – who we thought was lost – to work a miracle and save Alex by giving him the money he needs to leave. Some may say: "That's impossible. Who would do such a thing?" But I wanted him to do it, because cinema makes it possible. In the end, the friend takes the place of the brother, doing what he should have done. In doing so, Mathias elevates himself.

**The film unravels at full speed. There's no time to take a breath. Alex drives around on his scooter, learns Hebrew while cooking cocaine doses...**

This dynamic is what I was looking for, and I really found it during editing with François Quiqueré, who understood very quickly that Alex's determination was to set the pace of the film. We wanted ALIYAH to be a real action film. The work on drama we had started with Gaëlle Macé continued in the editing room.

**You worked with quite a young crew.**

I wanted to team up with people who were mostly making their first (or second) film, like me. In any case a team that would pour all their energy into and for the film. I'm thinking of first assistant director Gabriel Levy, for instance, or sound engineer Mathieu Villien and set designer Gaëlle Usandivaras.

**It was also the cinematographer's first film.**

Yes indeed, it's the first feature film of David Chizallet, whom I met at the Femis. We had already worked together, and I knew that his talent as a cameraman and a cinematographer would make the film go up a notch. We worked a lot before shooting to choose colors, light directions and frames. And during the shooting, he kept coming out with solutions and kept taking risks.

**Did it take you a long time to finance the film?**

Yes. Producer Lola Gans and I went through a real marathon-like experience. The mixing of genres and tones seemed puzzling to some people, but we finally managed to convince some others that it was part of the ambition and modernity of the film. Actually, Alex's determination is very much like what it takes to make a first film.

**Let's talk about the end of the film, which is quite open. Alex is in Israel. He hardly speaks Hebrew, and understands it even less. He spends his time working, all alone.**

One might think that his situation is even worse than when he was alone in Paris. Because this time, he is alone in the world. But I don't see it that way. He stands by the window, his whole being open to the world. Jeanne's drawing is pinned up the wall, which means she is still probably in his heart. But he has cut himself loose from his brother and their sorrow. Therefore, he has made a step forward. Maybe he will never really get rid of his melancholy. But at least, he's moving forward.

## CAST BIOGRAPHIES

### **PIO MARMAI** (Alex)

Pio Marmai was born in Strasbourg, France in 1984. With both his parents working as stage and costume designers for the Strasbourg National Opera, Pio had from an early age a deep interest in drama. He attended classes of the Scuola Commedia dell'Arte Antonio Fava and the St Etienne National Drama Centre and began his career on stage at the Comédie-Française.

After a brief stint on television, he launched himself into cinema.

In 2008, he was nominated for the Césars, the French Academy Awards, as Best Promising Male Actor for his role as the rebellious older brother in *The First Day of the Rest of Your Life*, directed by Rémi Bezançon. Since 2010 Pio Marmai has been working steadily, notably in the role of the kidnapper in *In Your Hands*, co-starring Kristin Scott Thomas, and in Isabelle Czaika's *Living on Love Alone*, for which he was once again nominated to the Césars as Best Promising Male Actor. More recently, he appeared in *The Delicacy* from directors Stephane and David Foenkinos, co-starring *Amélie*'s Audrey Tautou.

### **FILMOGRAPHY**

*Aliyah* (2012) - Alex

*Delicacy* (2011) – François

*A Happy Event* (2011) – Nicolas Malle

*In Your Hands* (2010) – Yann

*Living On Love Alone* (2010) - Ben

*The First Day Of The Rest Of Your Life* (2008) – Albert Duval

*Nothing In The Pockets* (2008) – Marcel (TV movie)



## **ADÈLE HAENEL (Jeanne)**

22-year-old Parisian Adèle Haenel made her screen acting debut in 2002 in the lead role of Christophe Ruggia's *The Devils*. In 2007, she received a César nomination as Best Promising Actress for her role in Céline Sciamma's *Water Lilies*. After appearing in films during her studies, Adèle finally opted for a full-time acting career in 2010, and made four films in a row, three of which were selected for Cannes 2011: Valérie Mréjen and Bertrand Schefer's *Iris In Bloom*, Bertrand Bonello's *House of Tolerance*, and Jean Jacques Jauffret's *Heat Wave*. In 2012, she was once again nominated to the Césars as Best Promising Actress for her performance in *House of Tolerance*. She has gained international recognition with a Shooting Stars Award in 2011, confirming that Adèle Haenel is a talent to watch.

### **FILMOGRAPHY**

***Aliyah* (2012)** – Jeanne

***Three Worlds* (2012)** - Marion

***Heat Wave* (2011)** – Amélie

***Iris In Bloom* (2011)** – Isabelle

***House Of Tolerance* (2011)** – Léa

***Water Lilies* (2007)** – Floriane

***The Devils* (2002)** – Chloé



## **CEDRIC KAHN (Isaac)**

Cedric Kahn began his career in the film industry as a Video Editing Assistant in Maurice Pialat's *Under the Sun of Satan*. In 1989, he directed his first shorts, *Nadir* and *The Last Hours of the Millenium*. Confused by his image of "naturalist filmmaker", Cedric Kahn distanced himself from auteur cinema to work on film adaptations. In 1998, his film *L'Ennui*, an adaptation of Alberto Moravia's novel *Boredom*, was nominated for the Grand Prix des Amériques at the Montreal World Film Festival. His early success was followed by international acclaim for *Roberto Succo*, which was nominated for the Palme d'Or in Cannes in 2001, and *Red Lights*, which entered the selection of the 2004 Berlin Film Festival. Cedric Kahn is today not only a talented filmmaker but a prolific screenwriter and actor (*Aliyah*). He currently teaches at France's National Film School Femis, and has become an influential personality in the French film industry.

## **FILMOGRAPHY**

### Actor

***Aliyah* (2012)**

### Director

***A Better Life* (2011)**

***Regrets* (2009)**

***Red Lights* (2004)**

***Roberto Succo* (2001)**

***L'Ennui* (1998)**

***The Last Hours Of The Millenium* (1989) – Short Film**

***Nadir* (1989) – Short Film**



## **GUILLAUME GOUIX (Mathias)**

Guillaume Gouix trained at the Marseilles Conservatory for Dramatic Arts and at the Regional School of Actors in Cannes. He began his career in television films. In 2003, he played the lead in the feature film *Sleep Tight (Les Lionceaux)* and received critical acclaim for his impressive physical acting and intense performance. In 2007, he appeared in the war film *L'ennemi intime (The Intimate Enemy)*, in which he played a young corporal in the Algerian War. Highly praised for his dramatic performances, Guillaume's career started to take off. In 2011 he starred in several features, and had a small role in Woody Allen's *Midnight in Paris*. He was nominated for Most Promising Actor in the 2012 César Awards for his role in *Jimmy Rivière*, and already stars in three features to be released in 2012: *Aliyah* from director Eli Wajeman, *Outdoors (Hors Les Murs)* from David Lambert, and *Mobile Home* from François Piron.

In 2012, Guillaume Gouix appears in another Film Movement title, *The Day I Saw Your Heart*, directed by Jennifer Devoldère and co-starring French actress Mélanie Laurent.

## **FILMOGRAPHY**

***Aliyah (2012)*** – Mathias

***Hors Les Murs (2012)*** - Ilir

***Mobile Home (2011)*** - Julien

***Outdoors (2011)*** – Ilir

***The Day I Saw Your Heart (2011)*** – Sami

***Jimmy Rivière (2011)*** – Jimmy Rivière

***Nobody Else But You (2011)*** – Brigadier Bruno Leloup

***Belle Epine (2010)*** - Reynald

***The Intimate Enemy (2007)*** – Delmas

***Darling (2007)*** – Joseph

***Sleep Tight (2003)*** – Gustave

***Strong Shoulders (2003)*** – Rudi (TV Movie)

## **CREDITS**

### **CAST**

|                            |                         |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>Alex</b>                | PIO MARMAI              |
| <b>Isaac</b>               | CEDRIC KAHN             |
| <b>Jeanne</b>              | ADELE HAENEL            |
| <b>Mathias</b>             | GUILLAUME GOUIX         |
| <b>Esther</b>              | SARAH LE PICARD         |
| <b>Nathan</b>              | DAVID GESELSON          |
| <b>Polo</b>                | OLIVIER DESAUTEL        |
| <b>The Father</b>          | JEAN-MARIE WINLING      |
| <b>Anaëlle</b>             | MAR SODUPE              |
| <b>Gabriel</b>             | AIME VAUCHER            |
| <b>Claude</b>              | BERTRAND CONSTANT       |
| <b>Rebecca</b>             | MARION PICARD           |
| <b>The Aunt</b>            | BRIGITTE JAQUES WAJEMAN |
| <b>Lucie</b>               | LOUISE ROCH             |
| <b>The Client</b>          | JEAN-BAPTISTE AZEMA     |
| <b>Secretary</b>           | SOPHIE PCCIOTTO         |
| <b>Nadav</b>               | ZOHAR WEXLER            |
| <b>Amis Polo</b>           | DJIBRIL GUEYE           |
|                            | KIANOUSH MOGHADAM       |
| <b>Jewish Agency Guard</b> | DANIEL ELIYA            |

## **CREW**

|                                 |  |
|---------------------------------|--|
| <b>Director</b>                 | ELIE WAJEMAN   |
| <b>Screenplay and Dialogues</b> | ELIE WAJEMAN<br>GAELLE MACE                            |
| <b>Produced by</b>              | LOLA GANS  |
| <b>Cinematographer</b>          | DAVID CHIZALLET  |
| <b>First Assistant Direct</b>   | GABRIEL LEVY   |
| <b>Script Supervisor</b>        | LEILA GEISSLER   |
| <b>Editor</b>                   | FRANCOIS QUIQUERE                                      |
| <b>Sound</b>                    | MATHIEU VILLIEN<br>SANDY NOTARIANNI<br>EMMANUEL CROSET |
| <b>Set Designer</b>             | GAELLE USANDIVARAS                                     |
| <b>Costumes</b>                 | CATHERINE RIGALT                                       |
| <b>Make-up</b>                  | RAPHAELLE THEIRCELIN                                   |
| <b>Casting</b>                  | SARAH TEPER<br>LEILE FOURNIER                          |
| <b>Production Manager</b>       | HELENE BASTIDE   |
| <b>Location Manager</b>         | STEPHANIE DELBOS                                       |
| <b>Postproduction Manager</b>   | JULIETTE MALLON  |
| <b>A Production of</b>          | 24 MAI PRODUCTION<br>LES FILMS PELLEAS                 |