

ADVOCATE

PRESS KIT



Directed by Rachel Leah Jones and Philippe Bellaiche

Running Time: 110 minutes

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SYNOPSIS

Lea Tsemel defends Palestinians: from feminists to fundamentalists, from nonviolent demonstrators to armed militants. As a Jewish-Israeli lawyer who has represented political prisoners for five decades, Tsemel, in her tireless quest for justice, pushes the praxis of a human rights defender to its limits. As far as most Israelis are concerned, she defends the indefensible. As far as Palestinians are concerned, she's more than an attorney, she's an ally.

ADVOCATE follows Tsemel's caseload in real time, including the high-profile trial of a 13-year-old boy — her youngest client to date — while also revisiting her landmark cases and reflecting on the political significance of her work and the personal price one pays for taking on the role of “devil's advocate.” Directing duo Rachel Leah Jones and Philippe Bellaiche assume the privileged position of a fly on the wall of Tsemel's practice, where a year of documenting is like gathering a lifetime of evidence. This evidence attests to the wrongs of occupation but also to the faults of those who try to resist it, the failings of those who try to defend them, and the fundamental flaws of a legal system that purports to serve justice but in fact serves the powers that be.

DIRECTORS' STATEMENTS

Rachel Leah Jones and Philippe Bellaiche

We first met Lea 25 years ago. By then, the once anonymous firebrand law student who, after the 1967 war, had fearlessly distributed flyers on campus warning her fellow Israelis to end the occupation or risk a vicious cycle of violence — was already a household name. For us, socially and politically engaged filmmakers, her rebellious spirit and radical zeal were an inspiration. But we could never do what Lea does; most people couldn't. In her life, as in her work, Lea straddles an incredible divide. On the one hand, she's the little boy calling the Emperor naked, i.e. naming the system's most fundamental fault: the occupier is judging the occupied. On the other hand, she's the boy with his finger in the dam, doing her utmost to uphold the rule-of-law before the flood of injustice drowns us all. As one military court judge once put it: "If Lea Tsemel didn't exist, we'd have to invent her."

Lea spoke truth to power before the term became popular and she'll continue to do so after fear makes it fashionable. As such, she is a model we're hard-pressed to preserve, in Israel and elsewhere. Lea, who has spent a lifetime going against the grain of Israeli society, is as much a product of it as she is an exception to it. Through her, we tell another kind of Israeli history, without a capital H. Not the usual: "We came, we saw, we conquered, we shot, we cried." More like: "We cooked, we cleaned, we cursed, we tried to better the world, but didn't always manage ...". Unlike the seminal works of recent years (*The Law in These Parts*, *The Gatekeepers*, *Censored Voices*), this is a female-centered story. Lea is almost always the only woman, or the only leftist, or the only Jew — in the room.

For the past two decades, we've watched Lea work with a mixture of awe and admiration, marveling at the fact that interrogators still infuriate her, prosecutors still madden her, judges still frustrate her, verdicts still disappoint her — and clients still break her heart. If we do our job right, yours will break too.

BIOGRAPHIES

RACHEL LEAH JONES (Director/Producer)

Born in Berkeley, California in 1970 and raised between Berkeley and Tel Aviv, Jones is a critically acclaimed documentary filmmaker whose work focuses on Israel/Palestine. She has a BA in Race, Class and Gender Studies and a MFA in Documentary Media Arts. Her directing credits include: 500DUNAM ON THE MOON (2002) commissioned by France Channel 2; ASHKENAZ (2007) commissioned by Israel Channel 8; TARGETED CITIZEN (2010) commissioned by Adalah: the Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel; and GYPSY DAVY (2012) commissioned by Israel Channel 8 (Sundance 2012). In addition to making her own films, Jones has produced extensively with others, e.g. WALL by Simone Bitton (Cannes 2004; Special Jury Prize Sundance 2005) and has been affiliated with progressive media outlets such as DEMOCRACY NOW! in New York.

PHILIPPE BELLAICHE (Director/Producer)

Born in Paris, France in 1967, Bellaiche is an award-winning DP whose credits include BETWEEN FENCES (Berlin 2016); ONCE I ENTERED A GARDEN (Rome 2012); Z32 (Venice 2008); and AVENGE BUT ONE OF MY TWO EYES (Cannes 2005) by Avi Mograbi; THE SETTLERS (Sundance 2016) and HOTHOUSE (Special Jury Prize Sundance 2007) by Shimon Dotan; GYPSY DAVY (Sundance 2012) by Rachel Leah Jones; THE FLAT (Tribeca 2012; Israel Academy Award 2011) by Arnon Goldfinger; INCESSANT VISIONS (Jerusalem 2011), THE JOURNEY OF VAN NGUYEN (IDFA 2005) and RAGING DOVE (First Prize Doc Aviv 2002; Certificate of Merit SFIFF 2002) by Duki Dror; ROUTE 181:FRAGMENTS OF A JOURNEY THROUGH PALESTINE/ISRAEL (Second Prize Yamagata 2005) by Eyal Sivan and Michel Khleifi; FROM LANGUAGE TO LANGUAGE (First Prize Doc Aviv 2004) by Nurith Aviv; FORGET BAGHDAD (FIPRESCI Award Locarno 2002) by Samir Jamal al-Din. A cinematography lecturer and master class teacher, Bellaiche also received the Cinema Arts Award in 2013.

PAUL CADIEUX (Co-Producer)

In his more than three decades as a producer, co-producer, executive producer and distributor, Paul has won numerous awards, among them a Genie for the Oscar-nominated animated feature LES TRIPLETTES DE BELLEVILLE. Recent documentary credits include THE SETTLERS by Shimon Dotan (Sundance 2016) and PS JERUSALEM by Danae Elon (Berlin 2016).

JOËLLE BERTOSSA (Co-Producer)

Joelle Bertossa is founder and managing director of CloseUp Films, and produces a wide range of projects including fiction, documentaries, TV series and web docs. Recent credits include: THE SHADOW OF WOMEN by Philippe Garrel (Director's Fortnight Cannes 2015) and the Oscar-nominated I AM NOT YOUR NEGRO by Raoul Peck.

YAEL BITTON (Editor)

Born in Geneva, Switzerland in 1971, Bitton is an editor and story consultant based in Paris. Recent editing credits include: MACHINES by Rahul Jain; THE WONDERFUL KINGDOM OF PAPA ALAEV by Noam Pinchas and Tal Barda; MUCHACHAS by Juliana Fanjul; TACACHO by Felipe Monroy; PETITS ARRANGEMENTS AVEC L'AMOUR by Ilana Navaro; THINGHIR: ECHOES FROM THE MELLAH by Kamal Hachkar; WATERMARKS by Yaron Zilberman. Over the years, he has taught and consulted in numerous frameworks such as Femis, Cinédoc, DOK.Incubator and Rough Cut Service.

CREDITS

Directed by

Rachel Leah Jones, Philippe Bellaiche

Produced by

Philippe Bellaiche, Rachel Leah Jones, *Home Made Docs*

Paul Cadieux, *FilmOption*

Joelle Bertossa, *Close Up Films*

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Channel 8

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RTS

SWR

NDR

EO/IKONdocs

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