



## THE BAND'S VISIT On Dislocation



**Directed by Eran Kolirin**  
**Starring Sasson Gabai, Ronit Elkabetz,**  
**Saleh Bakri, Khalifa Natour, Imad Jabarin,**  
**Tarak Kopty, Hisham Khoury, Francois Khell,**  
**Eyad Sheety**

While the brief but devastating war between Egypt and Israel in June, 1967, officially lasted only six days, the enmity between the two countries has endured for many years since. In 1981 former Egyptian president Anwar Sadat was violently assassinated, by his own countrymen no less, for his role in the historic peace accord with his Northern neighbours. This turbulent historical backdrop thus adds a good deal of weight to Kolirin's gently understated debut feature.

One day a small Egyptian police band arrives at Tel Aviv airport for a guest performance at a regional initiation ceremony. Due to bureaucratic incompetence, or perhaps just bad luck, they find themselves stranded and have to make their own way to the gig. After boarding the wrong bus, however, the band winds up even more acutely stranded in a tiny remote town somewhere in the desert.

While some locals regard this troupe of Arab musicians – all decked out in matching sky blue uniforms – with a mixture of bemusement and suspicion, the owner of a small roadside café shows the band some hospitality and arranges for them to spend the night billeted at her place, as well as with several other families.

This rather sparsely plotted fish-out-of-water comedy/drama initially evokes Aki

Kaurismäki's *Leningrad Cowboys Go America* in many ways, but as the various characters begin to interact with the locals over the course of an evening, a far warmer, more humanitarian film soon emerges.

Lanky young violinist and sometime jazz trumpet player Khaled (*Bakri*) fits in the most easily – he's a ladies' man and hence understands the universal language of love. Band leader Tewfiq (*Gabai*) appears to be little more than a stuffy bureaucrat, but when café owner Dina (*Elkabetz*) persuades him to go out for coffee and a bite to eat with her, Tewfiq gradually (and only temporarily) drops his stern façade to reveal a softer, sensitive side that harbours great sadness with a quiet dignity.

Not a lot happens in this part of the world, or in this gentle portrait of dislocation, but still there's a subtle lyricism and gently ironic wit in writer and director Kolirin's minimal dialogue, his choice of colour palette, and in the stark visual compositions of each shot. The actors' performances are equally impressive, with not so much as a single wrong note amongst them.

TIM STEWART

*The Band's Visit* screens at UWAS Somerville Auditorium from February 19-24 and Joondalup Pines from February 25-March 2 as part of the Lotterywest Festival Films season.