

AMIR HAREL - LAMA PRODUCTIONS PRESENT

A FILM BY RA'ANAN ALEXANDROWICZ

Quinzaine des Réalisateurs 2003
Festival de Cannes

JAMES'

JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM



A ZEITGEIST FILMS RELEASE

JAMES' JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM

A cannily droll mix of social commentary and modern fable, Israeli filmmaker Ra'anana Alexandrowicz (THE INNER TOUR)'s debut feature follows the adventures of young James, a devout wide-eyed Christian attempting a pilgrimage from his African village to the Holy Land. Jailed by the immigration authorities upon his arrival in Tel Aviv, this contemporary Candide is miraculously bailed out by a shady small-time businessman only to become part of his migrant labor pool. Undeterred, James perseveres in his religious quest--until he gets a taste of fortune by exploiting his employer's friends and colleagues for his own profit. Alexandrowicz filters an astute exploration of the economic, moral and spiritual hypocrisies of Western society through an evocative portrait of modern Israel's cultural and generational divisions. Topped with a moving and charismatic performance by South African actor Siyabonga Melongisi Shibe, JAMES' JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM stealthily layers these serious issues with biting wit and a lilting fairy-tale charm.

"I think there is a James in each and every one of us. We all learn too well, as people and as societies, how to talk about our noble dreams as an easy way of forgetting them." –Director Ra'anán Alexandrowicz

Director's Statement

A few years ago, I knew a Nigerian man named James who was living in Israel at the time on a long-expired tourist visa. James was around 40 years old. He was a banker by profession, but due to the political and economical situation in Nigeria, he now lived in Tel-Aviv and worked cleaning houses. James used to share with me the hardships, fears and sorrows of a migrant worker's life, as well as his memories from his homeland, Nigeria, and his dream of life in a place he one day hoped to reach: Canada.

One day, James told me something that startled me. He described how he had imagined my country before he had come to live and work here: He imagined the Holy Land as a green, plentiful land, flowing with milk and honey, as is written in the bible. In this land, he thought, dwelled the most peaceful and happy people, the most virtuous people in the world: The Lord's chosen people. "I remember the moment I got out of the airplane at the airport here," he told me with a smile, "I smelled the sweetness of the air, tears came to my eyes, and I began to cry because, at long last, I had arrived in the Holy Land."

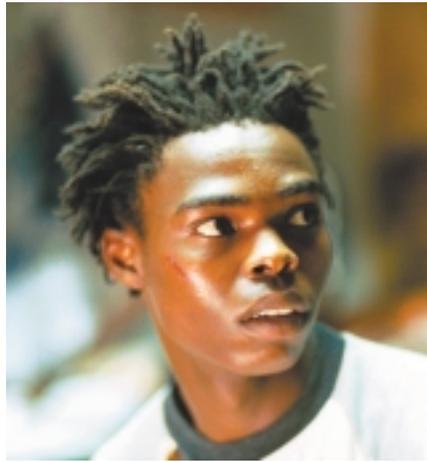
When I heard these words, I realized I was hearing the opening scene of a film, though I did not know yet what that film would be about. The contradictions and irony I felt upon hearing these few sentences spoken by a man who was living in the most rundown part of my city, a man who made his living cleaning bathrooms and kitchens, led me to begin writing "James' Journey to Jerusalem" – a movie which I consider to be a contemporary economic fairy tale, with realistic elements.

The first thing I thought of about the film was the fundamental, strong contradiction between the Holy Land as an abstract, spiritual entity in the mind of many people in the world, and it being Israel, a country with a very prosaic existence—a fast developing country, with a modern economy, traffic jams, shopping malls, immigration laws, and exploited migrant workers.

What I imagined was a man who comes to Israel as a pilgrim from as far away as a pilgrim can come. This man only knows the Holy Land from the description in the bible. When he arrives, a bureaucratic mistake scuttles his plan to become a tourist in a heavenly land: Instead, he finds himself falling into the difficult position of a migrant worker. I used this as the starting point of the journey—a journey on which James observes Israeli society, as I feel it is today. Although the content that comprises this story is purely Israeli, I think the observations that the fictitious, naïve James has about Israel are valid not only about our country, but also about most of the places that make up the Western World.

One of the most significant experiences of cinema, in my opinion, is that it can make you see the world through someone else's eyes for a while. If we take this one step further, cinema is able to do something even stronger: It can show you yourself through someone else's eyes. I see "James' Journey to Jerusalem" as a reflection of my feelings about my society—especially the powerful interplay between economic factors and almost any other social behavior.

Our film is also a story about a man who has a dream, but who is led by reality to lose his way toward its fulfillment without realizing what is happening to him. In a way, I think there is a bit of James in each and every one of us. We learn too well, as people and as societies, how to talk about our noble dreams as an easy way of forgetting them. I think each of us has his or her Jerusalem toward which we aspired to reach. Whether we reach it, or even remember where we were headed, is another issue.



Siyabonga Melongisi Shibe

James

Siyabonga grew up in Umlazi, Durban in Kwazulu Natal. He decided from an early age that he wanted to become an actor and after matriculating went to study drama at Natal Technikon. After graduating in 1999 he came to Johannesburg (the Mecca of the entertainment industry in South Africa) to follow his dreams in the world of acting. In 2002 he was nominated for South Africa's Best Actor award for the TV drama GAZ'LAM. He won the Best Actor award (the Wolgin Award) at the Jerusalem Film Festival for his starring role in JAMES' JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM.

Filmography

The Stripes Of A Zebra (1999, UK, feature film)

Soul City (1999, South Africa, TV drama)

Gaz'Lam (2002, South Africa, TV drama)

Third World (2002, Canada, feature film)

Stok-Vel (2003, South Africa, TV sitcom)

James' Journey to Jerusalem (2003, Israel, feature film)



Ra'anan Alexandrowicz

Director

Ra'anan Alexandrowicz was born in Jerusalem in 1969. He graduated from high school in Jerusalem in 1987 as a physics major. From 1991 to 1996 he studied film at the Sam Spiegel film and television school in Jerusalem with a focus on fiction. From 1997 to 2001 he concentrated mainly on documentary work, and also directed two music videos.

His acclaimed documentary **THE INNER TOUR** followed a group of Palestinians on a three-day bus tour through Israel in 2000. This film was included in the 31st New Directors/New Films series presented by The Film Society of Lincoln Center and The Museum of Modern Art in New York City in 2002.

Alexandrowicz received the culture ministry filmmaker award scholarship in 2002. **JAMES' JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM** is his first fiction feature.

Filmography

Self Confidence Ltd. (1996, 21 mins)

On the Other Side of the Tracks (1999, 25 mins)

Martin (1999, 52 mins)

The Inner Tour (2000, 95 mins)

James' Journey to Jerusalem (2003, 87 mins)

JAMES' JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM

A film by Ra'anan Alexandrowicz

starring

Siyabonga Melongisi Shibe as *James*

Arie Elias as *Sallah*

Salim Daw as *Shimi*

with

Sandra Schonwald

Hugh Masebenza

Florence Bloch

Ya'akov Ronen Morad

Director	Ra'anan Alexandrowicz
Producer	Amir Harel
Script	Ra'anan Alexandrowicz & Sami Duenias
Cinematography	Shark (Sharon) De-Mayo
Editing	Ron Goldman
Casting	Orit Azoulay
Production Design	Amir Dov Pick
Costume Design	Maya Barsky
Sound Engineer	David Lis
Sound Design	Ronen Nagel
Musical Score	Ehud Banay with Gil Smetana & Noam Halevi

Israel • 2003 • 87 mins • Color
1.85:1 • Dolby Digital • 35mm
In Hebrew, English and Zulu with English subtitles

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