

MEMORABLE SCENES DEBUNK HOLOCAUST DENIAL IN JEWISH FILMMAKERS' GLOBAL FEATURE FILM



Movie pundits predict gut-wrenching scenes that address antisemitism will be among the highlights of the soon-to-be released international vignette feature film *Anno 2020*, which is directed by New Zealand-born James Morcan.

For Sydney-based producer and actor Gil Ben-Moshe, the scenes are memorable because they contrast vividly with the film's main themes and they tackle the ugly phenomenon of Holocaust denial head on.

One scene set in a synagogue features Gil's twin brother Oren Ben-Moshe, a fellow actor and producer. Their older brother Yaron was born in Israel, and Oren also worked and lived there. The Jewish twins, who have acted together in numerous film and television productions, are producing *Anno 2020* through their production company MoneyShot Productions.

In the cemetery scene a solitary mourner, played by Gil, remonstrates with an anti-Semitic visitor, played by Sydney-based Morcan. Ben-Moshe's character directly confronts Morcan's anti-Semite character when he overhears him inform a carer that the Holocaust was all just "a hoax" and that "six million Jews did not die".

The explosive scene, filmed in Sydney's South Head Cemetery, is one the filmmakers believe will make an emphatic statement about the alarming and fascist reasons why certain people still attempt to deny the historically-verified genocide.

Ben-Moshe says the reason for the scene is to expose the anti-Semitic mindset that exists in all Holocaust deniers.

"It is obviously an extremely sensitive subject to capture on film, but somehow by laying bare the unyielding hatred individuals like James' character possess,

we will hopefully display to film audiences the everyday challenges Jews face in the wider world," he says.

"And by giving a Holocaust-denying character enough rope, he, of course, eventually hangs himself when he is shown to have zero historical facts as my character systematically debunks his erroneous theories one by one."

Ben-Moshe adds that the irony is that Morcan, the film's director, co-authored a 2016 book titled *Debunking Holocaust Denial Theories*.

"Published by Sterling Gate Books, it was co-written with the assistance of Holocaust survivors and was well received by book critics, WW2 historians and the Jewish community worldwide."

Anno 2020 represents Morcan's directorial debut. A screenwriter as well as an author, he also wrote the novel and the screenplay adaptation. He describes the story as a multicultural kaleidoscope of interconnected characters seeking redemption, forgiveness and peace during the wild year that was 2020.

"It's a vignette film, a rare type of movie where there are various plots instead of just one. These are told separately, but they all intersect at the end to ultimately become part of one larger story," Morcan says.

"Other vignette films, including 'Crash', 'Babel', 'Love Actually', 'Short Cuts' and 'Magnolia', were well-reviewed, award-winning and generated excellent box office returns."

Getting into character for this role was no problem for Ben-Moshe, especially as his character Levi is semi-autobiographical and is inspired by many of his own real life experiences.

"We were raised in a rough inner city area of Sydney," he says. "And being the only Jewish family in the neighbourhood was difficult. We weren't accepted by our neighbours and integration in the community was an impossibility. Vilification, antisemitism, and violence became part of our daily lives over the next two-and-a-half decades."

Gil and Oren are onscreen together in a sequence shot inside Sydney's Rose Bay synagogue Kehillat Kadimah Shul where they share screen time with local actor and politician Michael Gencher, renowned artist and journalist Geoff Sirmai, and Yonatan Barukh, a teacher at the Sydney Jewish school Moriah College.

The film's Jewish themes continue in scenes shot on location in Tel Aviv where Israeli actress Lital Luzon plays Gil's long-distance love interest in a compelling appearance.

Anno 2020 was filmed over 12 months during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, and despite having to navigate lockdowns and travel restrictions it was shot in 17 cities across five countries on four continents. Film crews shot cast members in Israel, China and Italy as well as several states within the US and Australia.

Requiring the employment of camera crews and cast around the world, it features dialogue in English, Hebrew, Mandarin and Italian, and it boasts an award-winning ensemble of international actors.

The cast includes leading Australians Greg Poppleton (*Backtrack*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*) and Erin Connor (*Occupation: Rainfall*, *Dino King 3D*), as well as US veterans Kevin Scott Allen (*Star Trek*, *Alias*, *Prison Break*) and Sheila Ball (*Assault on VA-33*).

A rough first edit of Anno 2020 has already been completed. One of the next steps in the post-production process, according to Ben-Moshe, is to begin developing the soundtrack.

“We expect the soundtrack will be absolutely crucial for a sensitive, character-driven film such as this. To shape the sound of the film, we are in talks with Kim Allen Kluge and Kathryn Kluge, the Oscar-nominated husband-and-wife-composing team who previously created the score for Martin Scorsese’s 2016 film Silence, starring Liam Neeson.”

Ben-Moshe also says revolutionary filmmaking methods had to be devised to work around the lockdowns.

“This was achieved in part by utilising new technologies, and we were extraordinarily fortunate to attract renowned film industry partners in each city who helped us navigate the numerous obstacles confronting us.”

Anno 2020 is the fourth feature film Ben-Moshe and Morcan have made together, having previously shot the post-Apocalyptic film After Armageddon and two OZ-Bollywood movies, My Cornerstone and Love You Krishna, which were both filmed in India and Australia, incorporating English and Hindi, and released internationally.

The filmmakers say their immediate goal for Anno 2020 is to earn acceptance into major film festivals later in the year. MoneyShot Productions’ longer-term targets include a theatrical release, followed by online distribution on major streaming platforms.

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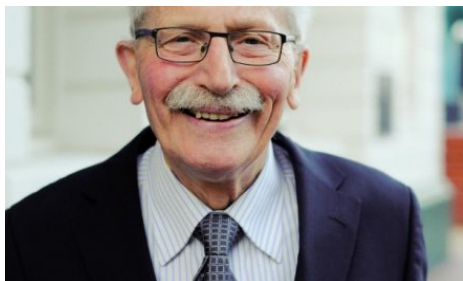
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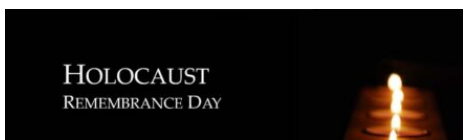
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