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'Anno 2020' takes a unique approach to pandemic production

by [Sean Slatter](#)
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Andre Doc Williams in 'Anno 2020'.

Seventeen cities. Five countries. Four continents. One global pandemic.

That was the equation for producer Gil Ben-Moshe and writer/director James Morcan when it came to the production of independent feature *Anno 2020*.

Filming wrapped last month on the project, which involved separate crews shooting cast members in Israel, China, and Italy, as well as several states within the US and Australia, with dialogue in English, Hebrew, Mandarin, and Italian.

Based on Morcan's novel of the same name, the story follows a group of interconnected characters across the world as they seek redemption, forgiveness, and peace amid the events of 2020.

The ensemble cast includes Australians Greg Poppleton and Erin Connor, as well as US actors Kevin Scott Allen and Sheila Ball.

Anno 2020 is the directorial debut of New Zealand-born Morcan, who began writing the novel soon after the initial lockdowns began in 2020 and also acts the film.

He said the film reflected a "multicultural kaleidoscope" of experiences.

"It's a vignette film, a rare type of movie where there are various plots instead of just one," he said.

"These are told separately, but they all intersect at the end to ultimately become part of one larger story."



Gil Ben-Moshe.

It's the fourth feature film Morcan and Ben-Moshe have made together, having previously shot the post-apocalyptic film *After Armageddon* and Oz-Bollywood movies, *My Cornerstone* and *Love You Krishna*.

Ben-Moshe, who is producing for Sydney-based Moneyshot Productions with twin brother Oren and also stars in the film, said while lockdowns provided the framework for the various plot strands, there were themes that went well beyond the pandemic.

"[The film] is about relationships and what it means to be human, as well as family and community," he told IF.

"From my perspective, the lockdowns added an extra layer of intensity in the movie."

A notable byproduct of lockdowns has been the rise in remote forms of communication, which the 12-month shoot explored on both sides of the camera.

In scenes specifically designed to emulate Zoom meetings, actors spoke their lines to the camera in different parts of the world so they could be put side-by-side in post-production.

Video-conferencing software also helped Ben-Moshe and Morcan maintain a presence on shooting locations outside of Australia, with the pair communicating through an iPhone attached to the top of the camera, as well as strategically placed iPads.

The former said the techniques would offer a different kind of viewing experience.

"In terms of filmmaking, it's very unusual you have two of the characters side by side, acting out a scene; it's usually a two shot, or you do over the shoulder, then a close up, then a wide shot," he said.

"It's really interesting the way people and audiences view this style of acting, because, for me, reactions of people to what you're saying are more important than the actual dialogue.

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Crystal J. Huang and Jessica Castello

"It becomes personal because they are looking down the barrel of a camera almost, and as the audience, you feel as though they are talking to you."

Ben-Moshe, along with the rest of the cast, was asked to draw on their own personal experience in order to shape their respective character arcs.

For his role as Levi, he filmed scenes outside his childhood home in Woolloomooloo and incorporated the challenges of growing up in the area with Jewish background.

Elsewhere, US actor Andre Doc Williams' portrayal of Jarrell Green includes a flashback of the character being kidnapped by family member as a ten-year-old and being forced to work at their car yard for two years – a life event that Williams actually went through.

The story reached new levels of authenticity in Tel Aviv, where actress Lital Luzon, who plays a character with COVID, contracted the virus prior to shooting.

Ben-Mosh said the story "kept evolving after every take", with many of the scenes improvised.

"We had a starting point and we had an end point," he said.

"We would start and then the scene would build and then, bang, the magic would come because it's so real and everything you are saying is real and the way you are reacting is real.

"The tricky thing was the editing because almost every single take was different."

With a rough cut of the film now complete, the production team is in the midst of developing a soundtrack with composers Kim Allen Kluge and Kathryn Kluge after the pair discovered the *Anno 2020* YouTube channel and reached out to discuss becoming involved.

The filmmakers are in discussions with distributors and also aim to enter the film on the festival circuit later in the year.

Ben-Moshe said the initial response to the rough cut had been encouraging.

"We want people to be moved and touched by the different subjects in the plot and I think we achieved that because a lot of people who watched the first cut said they cried multiple times," he said.

"If we can do that while we've just got a rough cut, then we are doing something right."

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