



Director Lior Ashkenazi and festival director Noa Regev outside Cinematheque 1 before the festival screening of Lanzmann's latest feature *Napalm*, which premiered at Cannes this year. The French filmmaker's 1973 documentary *Israel, Why* is also playing at this year's JFF on July 19.

Polonski promises an Oath

Emerging filmmaker Miki Polonski, whose short film *Shmama* premieres in the Israeli Shorts selection at Jerusalem Film Festival (JFF) this year, has revealed details of his upcoming debut feature. Entitled *Brothers' Oath*, the drama revolves around two brothers living in a housing project who are pushed to the limits by poverty. "The younger brother is a hopeless gambler, who pushes the family deeper into the dark until they get weaker and weaker and eventually vanish. I've almost finished the first draft of the script," says Polonski, who received development finance from the Rabinovich Foundation. *Shmama*, which is Polonski's second fiction short, heads to Locarno Film Festival in August after its JFF debut.

Melanie Goodfellow

Ashkenazi takes short Way Back

TOM GRATER
Lior Ashkenazi, known for his roles in *Big Bad Wolves*, *Walk On Water* and the Oscar-nominated *Patrol*, and also as the regular host of Jerusalem Film Festival's (JFF) opening night, is set to lead the cast of *The Way Back*, a short film that will shoot in the Israeli desert next month. The film is being directed by Moshe Rosenthal, who won the best director prize in JFF's short film competition for *Leave Of Absence* last year. Eyal Shiray (*My Father My Lord*) is producing the project, which is being funded by the Eyal Shiner Multicultural Film Fund and the Arava Film Festival. The short tells the story of a middle-aged man who has a secret love affair with a younger woman in the small town of Arava. When the pair go hiking in the desert, they suffer a fall and are stranded, facing them with a choice between calling for help or keeping their secret. Seeing *Leave Of Absence* at last year's JFF was the catalyst for Ashkenazi to board Rosenthal's



Maxim Dinstein

Lior Ashkenazi at JFF

new project. "I thought he was very talented," the popular Israeli actor tells *Screen International*. "When I read the new script, I found the role very interesting. I have never had the chance to play this kind of character, a person who finds himself between two worlds struggling to keep a secret." Ashkenazi adds that he likes to mix up his roles. "Between projects, I love to take part in smaller productions including student films and shorts," he says. "As an actor, you need to give the younger generation a chance to express themselves with serious actors."

Ma'aleh alumni seize the festival spotlight

BY MELANIE GOODFELLOW

Students of the Ma'aleh School of Television, Film and the Arts, past and present, will be out in force at Jerusalem Film Festival (JFF) today (July 19). The school, dubbed the only Jewish film school in the world with a curriculum catering to both religious and secular students, has been a driving force in fostering the representation of religious communities on the big and small screen since its creation 25 years ago.

Alumna Anat Yuta Zuria's documentary *Conventional Sins* premieres in the Israeli Documentary Competition while fourth year student Lihi Sabag's *Keren Or (A Ray Of Light)* plays in the Israeli Shorts line-up. A joint work with Shira Clara Winther, *Conventional Sins* reconstructs the adolescence of a young man abused by a network of ultra-Orthodox paedophiles and then banished from his

Hasidic community, through the diary he kept as a 15-year-old. Sabag's short documentary *Keren Or* follows a vulnerable single mother she met while doing civilian service. "It's a very touching story," says Einat Kapach, director of international relations and special projects at the school.

After JFF, Ma'aleh's profile looks set to rise on the international festival circuit in the coming months with the film of another alumnus, Amichai Greenberg, tipped to premiere at an A-list festival this autumn. *The Testament* is Greenberg's debut feature after a number of TV and new media works and revolves around a senior Orthodox Holocaust researcher who stumbles on a dark secret from this family's past. The drama is produced by Gum Films.

Talking about Ma'aleh's legacy, Kapach says: "There are Ma'aleh graduates throughout the film and

TV industry today. Stories about religious people hardly existed 20 years ago but now you have series like *Shtisel* and *Srugim*, both of which involved graduates." Both series, which were broadcast on Israel's Yes Network, are set against the backdrop of Orthodox communities; *Shtisel* is being remade for Amazon by *Friends* co-creator Marta Kauffman.

Other high-profile projects in the works from Ma'aleh graduates include Eliran Malka's *The Non-Conformists*. It is his debut feature after the well-travelled short film *71 Square Meters*, which focused on a young man returning to his former family home on the eve of its demolition. *The Non-Conformists* will explore the rise of Israel's ultra-Orthodox Shas party. Production company Dori Media Paran is already plotting a local and international career for the film ahead of its shoot in October.