



LEMON TREE The Sour Of Darkness



Directed by Eran Riklis
Starring Hiam Abbass, Doran Tavory, Ali Suliman, Rona Lipaz-Michael, Tarik Kopty, Amos Lavi, Amnon Wolf, Smadar Jaaron, Danny Leshman

American poet Robert Frost once pondered whether good fences make good neighbours. It's an interesting question, with ready arguments easily found on either side. In the case of Israel's troubled West Bank region, however, where Jews and Palestinians reside uneasily alongside one another, it would appear that the state of Israel has a preference for the affirmative.

Based upon a true story, *Lemon Tree* deals with this complex and problematic issue by focussing on a Palestinian widow's David and Goliath struggle to save her precious lemon grove – lovingly planted by her father and also her only means of earning a livelihood – from being uprooted by Israeli security forces.

The trouble starts for Salma Zidane (*Abbass*) when her neighbour, none other than the recently appointed Israeli Defence Minister Navon (*Tavory*), moves into a luxurious house only a matter of some 20 metres across the 'green line' border separating Israeli and Palestinian territories. Ever-watchful for potential security threats, the Secret Service agents assigned to protect the minister promptly decide that Zidane's flourishing lemon trees are an ideal source of cover for any terrorist intent on taking pot shots at Navon, or his wife Mira (*Lipaz-Michael*) for that matter.

The grove is summarily ordered to be razed to the ground. As a measure of 'goodwill', given that they are apparently not bound to do so by law, the security forces offer to pay compensation to the Palestinian woman. But for Salma, who is somewhat honour-bound by tradition never to accept an Israeli payout on any terms, it's a rather moot point. With the help of a kind Palestinian lawyer, Ziad Daud (*Suliman*), she decides to take on the authorities and fight tooth-and-nail to save her lemon trees.

Despite the central issue in play, this beautifully crafted film is about much more than one woman's legal problems. With great subtlety, Israeli-born director Riklis deftly constructs parallels between Salma Zidane and her counterpart over the fence, the rather unhappily married Mira Navon. Both have children, whom they love and miss dearly, living on the other side of the world; both are reduced to virtual prisoners in their own homes.

The political overtones of this quite even-handed treatment of the subject are unavoidable, but ultimately Eran Riklis claims that *Lemon Tree* is first and foremost about 'solitude as it is reflected in the lives of two women'.

TIM STEWART

***Lemon Tree* screens at UWA's Somerville Auditorium from Monday, February 23, until Sunday, March 1, and at Joondalup Pines from Monday, March 2, until Sunday, March 8, as part of the Lotterywest Festival Films season.**