Dancing Arabs, which was part of the most recent Vancouver Jewish Film Festival, has its general release on May 15. A multi-layered coming-of-age story, the screenplay is by Sayed Kashua, who wrote the novels on which it is based, and it is directed by Eran Riklis.

While called Dancing Arabs, the film is a combination of Dancing Arabs and Second Person Singular, two novels with very different tones. “I read a first draft that Sayed wrote before I joined the project and it was much more Dancing Arabs and it was much more kind of a comedy,” Riklis told the Independent in a phone interview. “But that changed. The first part of the movie, which was almost pure Italian comedy,” became a way to draw in the audience, “maybe taking away any preconceptions or resistance that an audience might have when it comes to see a film, where it has all the opinions in the world about the Arabs, and this and that.”

Riklis wanted the audience “to fall in love with the character and then, when the film changes its tone and it gradually becomes more and more dramatic … you can’t walk away because you love this character and you want to root for him, you want to join him on his journey.”

With the novel Dancing Arabs being autobiographical, Riklis said he had to remind Kashua that the film was a different entity. It was about Jews and Arabs and this and that.”

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The challenge was “to do something which is at once meaningful and yet communicative, and striving to reach a wider audience. For me,” said Riklis, “all my films, or most of my films, deal with, let’s say, not easy issues, but I always try to … remember that this has to be a good story.”

Reaction to his films has varied. “If you look at The Syrian Bride, for instance, it had a very warm reception everywhere, both in Israel and worldwide. Lemon Tree was very tough in Israel because it was a little bit too close to home, and then really about sensitive issues, and yet it was probably my biggest success worldwide.”

The response everywhere to Dancing Arabs has been “very emotional,” he said, which makes him happy because it means people “understand that this film comes from a place of respect and love and honoring the subject, as complicated as it is, but nobody’s trying to manipulate you here. There is a manipulation in the sense of filmmaking because that’s what filmmaking is about, but I think, emotionally speaking and intellectually speaking, this is a democratic film: it’s like, here are the facts, here’s the situation, here’s a story, here’s the person … and you judge for yourself.”

When asked what sets Dancing Arabs apart from his other films about the region, Riklis said, they “have dealt with either the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or the regional conflicts or the Druze conflict, whatever, but here we’re talking … about a minority that is 20 percent of the country. That’s 1.6 million people. It’s like you have some people living on the sidelines with two camels. This is a major thing and, not only that, they’re not in Afghanistan, they’re living right in the middle of

Please see RIKLIS on page 2
Dancing Arabs screens

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With the novel Dancing Arabs being autobiographical, Riklis said he had to remind Kashua that the film was a different entity. It was about Eyad, “and even though there are reflections of reality, the grandmother and the father, whatever it is, it still is a new life, which is true of almost any film that deals with a real story at least partly.”

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Cynthia Ramsay

r. Rania Okby was in Van-
couver last week, speaking to several groups, including the students at David
High School. On May 1, she addressed a small gathering at the University of
British Columbia. Fittingly, this latter talk was held in the Clyde Hertzman
Boardroom of Human Early Learning Partnership, which is, according to its
website, a “collaborative, interdisciplinary research network” whose “research explores
how different early environments and experiences contribute to inequalities in
children’s development.”

Okby spoke about traditional and
environmental factors that affect the
health of Bedouin women in Israel.
Currently doing a one-year-obses
fellowship at Sunnybrook Health Sci-
ence Centre at University of Toron-
to, Okby is a graduate of the Centre
for Bedouin Studies and Develop-
ment, Ben-Gurion University (BGU),
and is part of the staff at Soroka Uni-
versity Medical Centre and faculty of
health sciences at BGU, specializing
in high-risk pregnancy.

David Berson, executive director
doctoral program. Okby highlighted
the difficulties of crossing
between cultures, which can lead
to misunderstandings, so that
any one because you’ve tasted a lit-
tle of how the other feels. One of the
biggest challenges is that the Bedouin
and the non-Bedouin world live in
different times and are not always
able to see it the same way. This is
why Okby’s work is so important in
helping people understand each other
in a more effective way.

Okby also spoke of the
importance of education in
Bedouin culture. She mentioned
the difficulty of getting children to
attend school, as many Bedouin
children do not have access to
public education. Okby noted
that there is a need for more
resources and support in
order to improve
school attendance.

Dr. Rania Okby

Caring for Bedouins’ health

Approximately 72,000 Bedouin
women, or 62% of the population of
the Bedouin community, are living in
unrecognized villages. This is a
major challenge for the health
system, as these women lack
access to basic medical
services.

Okby emphasized the
importance of providing
education and support
for Bedouin women,
specifically in the areas of
nutrition, diabetes, and
obesity. She noted that
many Bedouin women are
affected by these issues,
and stressed the need
for increased awareness
and resources to
address these
community health problems.

Okby also discussed
the role of community
participation in health
education and services. She
noted that involving
Bedouin women in
health initiatives can
increase their
participation and
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In conclusion, Okby
emphasized the need for
continued
support and resources
for Bedouin women to
improve their health
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The program has developed
and evolved, and Okby
continues to work
actively in this
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Rania Okby is a
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In the past few years,
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Okby spoke about traditional and environmental factors that affect the health of Bedouin women in Israel. Currently doing a one-year obstetrics fellowship at University of British Columbia, Okby is a graduate of the Centre for Community Health Sciences at University of Toronto. She is the Dalai Lama, and we were talking afterward, I asked him, I said, 'Tell me the Mind. What is a Buddhist way to train the minds of young children?’ The Dalai Lama said, ‘We don’t try, we wait until they get older.’ But his translator, [thupten] Jirna said, ‘We have them memorize. We’ll take something long and each day they have to memo-

Caring for Bedouins’ health

“First, we often think that joy is the opposite of serious. If we’re walking down the school corridor and the kids are having a great time in the classroom, the nicely, we can’t possibly be doing a lesson because there’s too much noise, we can just look up these things, why do you have to memorize it? Then

DYNASTY from page 1

teach us. In some ways, I think the Orthodox Jewish education is like that. Each generation that is further from Mount Sinai knows less, and so we really want to try to absorb all that the older gen-

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An influence in Diamond’s work is Abraham Joshua Heschel’s emphasis on doing. In Judaism, action, not belief, is key. “There are two things. One is the music,” Diamond said. “You can’t talk about the other to people to get to know each other better. It’s going to be harder for other people to understand that you can deal with more and more the bigger picture and re-

Attachment is another key to healthy development. “I think Jewish families are pretty good about having secure attachment,” she said. Sometimes “you get a little enmeshed, but I think that Jewish families really let the child know that the child is loved and cared for, they’re there for the child.”

She added, “Of course, a kid who is not securely attached is going to be more fearful, it’s going to be harder for other people to understand that you can deal with more and more the bigger picture and re-

What Heschel said is that the musician might be playing for the money but if he’s thinking about the money when he’s playing the concert he’s not gonna play a good concert. While he’s doing it, it’s going to be heart and soul in the music. The child can see that he’s getting something back from it. You don’t have to do it for years and years before you can see the wisdom of what mom and dad wanted. You can see it pretty quickly.”

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Finally, in Be’er Sheva, which is a com-

Western lifestyle – influence both the physical health of Bedouin communities, said Okby. “This is a really important side of the health challenges facing Be’er Sheva. As Bedouin women, we are discriminated in Israel on three levels,” she said. First, by liv-

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