



288 Sparks presents:

# CHEER ME UP

a film by

Mili Ben Hayl & Tamar Shippony

Gili Saar Ofer Amram Ben Shellef

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<https://www.cheermeupmovie.com/>

September 2016 - 1H15 - 1.78 (16:9) - Dolby Srd 5.1 - B/W - Hebrew - Israel

**Jury Award - Official Selection - Kolkata International Film Festival (specialized FIAPF)**

# SYNOPSIS

Gili dreams of becoming an independent woman. Noam, her husband, cannot possibly think of releasing his hold of her, he loves her to death.

One day Gili starts working secretly, Noam is convinced she's cheating on him. They both use their 8-year old son, Assaf, as a trading card in order to get bits of information about each other.

The film *Cheer Me Up* reveals a 48-hour glimpse in the life of a family living in the shadow of domestic violence.



# Q&A

**WITH PRODUCERS/DIRECTORS MILI BEN HAYL & TAMAR SHIPPONY**

How did you come up with the idea for this film?

**Mili:** In 2004 I gave a creative writing workshop to a group of single mothers in a town located in central Israel. There I met Hava Luzon, a single mother to 3 children, who brought unsettling scenes from her life with her ex-husband. Hava's scenes were so strong and emotionally brave that I couldn't ignore them, Hava experienced domestic violence for 20 years and succeeded to find her way out. After a few weeks she approached me after class and wanted my help to combine scenes into a full script for a movie, she said to me: "I want to help other women see the signs before it's irreversible", I immediately agreed.

The film is based on real stories from Hava's life. Why did you choose a film that its duration is 48-hours in her life (compared to her 20 years of violence)?

**Mili:** Hava had a very substantial amount of stories that could have been adapted to the script, some were even so horrifying that I knew if I would add them to the film people wouldn't believe it's a true story. The decision of focusing on only a 48-hour time span was from a place that I wanted the viewer to feel the immense stress and anxiety of living under such violence in a type of 'real-time style', have them feel the tension progress very slowly, until it peaks towards the end.



There is no real physical violence in the film, talk more about the type of violence you focused upon.

**Mili:** Hava was not a physically battered woman (her ex-husband wouldn't hit or beat her). The violence she experienced was mostly verbal, mental, and sexual violence. There are all kinds and types of violence, and it was important for me to touch upon the areas that are in the gray-zone, areas that people don't usually notice are actually acts of violence.

Explain the cinematic approach of the film ?

**Mili and Tamar:** Because the story is based on true life events, we decided to film in a more documentary-style (hand-held camera, all natural lighting, no make-up artists, no effects, etc.). It was important for us to try and blur the borders between fiction and non-fiction in order to give the observer the real sensation of living in such fear and stressful reality. The operating of the camera was hand held throughout the whole film, aiming to give the feeling of unstableness. The shots were taken from angles all around the characters (360 degrees), with the purpose of sometimes breaking the rule of 180 degrees in order to create a chaotic state of mind. That was also the approach in the editing room.

How was it to work with the actors on the set?

**Mili and Tamar:** We had a full-written script but the actors never really got a copy of it. We read it together in the first rehearsal and they never got to read it again. We wanted them to find the characters within themselves and so even though there was a script and the actors knew pretty much what the end goal was for each scene, most of the dialogue was improvised. Also, Hava Luzon was on the set every day helping us with the acting, she had a lot of important insight that was necessary for us to understand the characters in a deeper way.

You produced and directed the film, how were you able to fund the film?

**Mili and Tamar:** We tried getting funds to film "Cheer Me Up", but after 2 years with no success we decided to go out independently and film on our own. With a small amount of money we had from our savings (around \$5,000), we gathered a small crew of very motivated and talented people who believed in the importance of the film, and so we went out and shot for 2 weeks. We then edited it ourselves and when we got to post-production stages where we needed to do color-correction and sound design we opened a crowdfunding project which helped us raise \$25,000 in 40 days. Later on received post-production funds of \$75,000 support from the Israel Film Fund, the Israeli Lottery Fund, and NFCT (the rest we invested from our own, eventually the budget of the film came out to be \$215,000)



## Who is Dafna Bar Zion whom this film is dedicated to at the end of the movie?

**Mili and Tamar:** Dafna Bar Zion was a musician and famous restaurateur in Israel who contacted us through our crowdfunding campaign. We met her in a small coffee shop in Tel-Aviv and the connection was immediate (Dafna insisted that Hava Luzon come to the meeting and the conversation between them was fascinating). Dafna didn't say anything about her private life but asked Hava many questions about her life and how she got away from her obsessive husband.

Dafna contributed a very generous amount of money to our campaign and suggested to write the music for the film free of charge. Together we agreed that we would contact her once we get to the stage of adding music to our film. Unfortunately this never happened - Dafna was murdered a few months later by her ex-husband who was a famous musician in Israel. This information was revealed to us only after the fact, we would have never guessed that Dafna, who was such a strong and successful woman, would be under the experience of domestic violence. It made it even more clear that domestic violence can happen to anyone, not just ones who are in the stigma of being a battered woman.

It is important for us to add that the song that accompanies the roll of the film is a song written, composed and sung by Dafna Bar Zion, it is a song she never really got to finish/publish, and here is the translation of it:

"Return to your roots, to the land of your forefathers, to the wind of the desert. Return to the heart that has been neglected, orphaned and forgotten; and is calling you to come back, to your home. Return from exodus/foreign territory, forgive the tired and uprooted heart. Open a window of opportunity and keep my prayer. Come back, to your homeland, to your natives, that call you back. Did you get enough love? and do you realize how much it's closeby. Did you find the answer/solution? and did you realize how simple it is? And if you're exhausted and worn out, my door is always open for you. Calling you to come back, to your homeland; your natives... Come back, Come Back. Come back..."





What is your main aim and message with this film?

**Mili and Tamar:** We wanted to touch upon the more “silent” areas of violence - the gray areas - violence that is more covert and at times can be more manipulative and dangerous. It was important for us to show the distress and anxiety the husband was going through, and to show that violence many times hides behind the excuse of “love”. We hope this film might raise awareness in people, both men and women either to seek out help, or even better to awaken their inner strength and break free from suppression and fear, knowing that they have control of their life and that they can do something about it.

# DIRECTOR'S BIO

**Mili Ben Hayl** is an independent director and screenwriter who studied at the the Dept. of Film and Television in Tel Aviv University. For over 15 years she has been giving workshops in creative writing and directing in diverse communities all around Israel.

**Tamar Shippony** is an experimental filmmaker and artist who studied at Pratt Institute in New York, USA and Bezalel Academy of Arts in Jerusalem, Israel. She holds an active art studio in Jerusalem.

Mili and Tamar, a couple in real life and in film, they have their our own production company called '288 Sparks' where they produce & direct films together.

## Filmography

2011 - 2016	"Cheer Me Up" - Independent Feature Film, 75 min
2014 - 2015	"Let Me Hear Thy Voice" - Documentary Film, 48 min
2009	"In Between" - Experimental Film
2001 - 2004	"Forerunners" - Documentary Film, 60 min



Mili Ben Hayl



Tamar Shippony

# CREDITS

Cast .....Gili Saar (as Gili), Ofer Amram (as Noam), Ben Shellef (as Assaf)

Directed and Produced by ..... Mili Ben Hayl & Tamar Shippony

Screenplay by ..... Hava Luzon & Mili Ben Hayl

Director of Photography ..... Mickey Noam-Alon

Edited by ..... Mili Ben Hayl & Tamar Shippony

Colorist ..... Steve Sebban

Original Music by ..... Ronit Rolland

Sound Design & Mix ..... Claus Lynge

