

## ‘Cupcakes’ loaded with deliciously empty calories

By Michael Fox

“Cupcakes,” the latest film from the commercially successful and openly gay Israeli director Eytan Fox, is an invigorating combination of flamboyant pop fantasy and surface-skimming self-actualization fable.

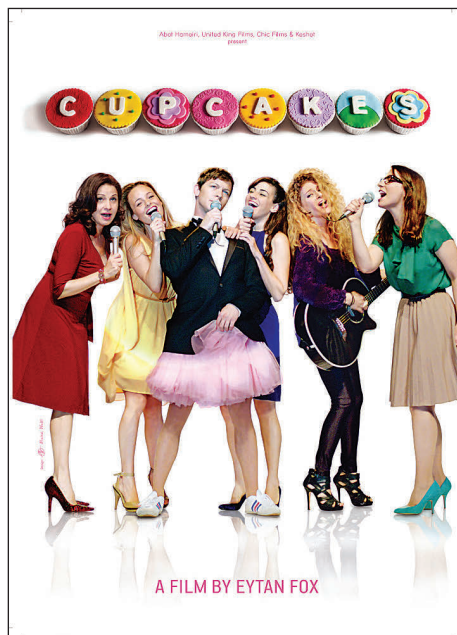
Packed to the edges with colorful costumes, gaudy accessories, snappy banter and catchy tunes, “Cupcakes” embraces kitsch with enough exuberance and skill to elevate it to art.

The result is 90 minutes of irresistible fun, with a dollop of satire and a pinch of social commentary that only enhance the recipe for idealistic escapism.

Fox and co-writer Eli Bijaoui gather five attractive, vaguely dissatisfied Tel Aviv women at their gay neighbor Ofer’s apartment to watch the annual UniverSong competition (standing in for the hugely popular Eurovision contest). In an effort to cheer up Anat, a baker in her 40s whose husband has just flown the coop to Thailand, they make up a song and serenade her.

Ofer records the impromptu performance on a cell phone and, on a whim, sends it to the committee charged with selecting Israel’s entry in the next UniverSong. Naturally, they pick this song with its engaging vocalists, but set about creating a hideously polished production number.

A certain amount of persuasion had been required to get the friends to participate in the first place. Efrat, the



lone professional musician among them, considers herself a serious (or at least uncompromising) artist and the garish UniverSong pageant beneath her. Keren, a blogger used to watching life from behind her keyboard, resists the spotlight while Yael, a former Miss Israel, knows firsthand that fame isn’t all it’s cracked up to be.

The most conflicted and unique character, Dana, is a religious woman who works for a religious Cabinet minister. Between her upbringing and career aspirations, she sees no way she can perform with her friends.

Ofer, on the other hand, is a nursery schoolteacher who’s so comfortable in his skin that he indulges his love of outré

women’s fashion at work. (The children are delighted.) His conservative boyfriend, the scion of a hummus empire and the face on their billboards, is a good deal more circumspect.

“Listen, buddy,” Ofer upbraids him, “if you’re looking for an extra lock on your closet, you’re in the wrong place. This isn’t Ikea.”

Eytan Fox’s films, including the international hits “Walk on Water” and “Yossi and Jagger,” are distinguished by gay and/or lesbian characters who typically embrace their identity and sexuality or do so in the last reel. The director’s ability to simultaneously depict homosexual characters as a fact of everyday life as well as special souls is amply displayed in “Cupcakes.”

One of the smartest moves that this smart movie makes is turning up the glitz at the international competition in Paris but dialing down expectations for a triumphant outcome. Anat and her cohorts are already winners by the time they take the stage, by being true to themselves or by recognizing and relinquishing their faults for the sake of loving relationships.

At the beginning of the movie, Keren confides, “There are two things that can change my mood: A good pop song. And sex.”

There’s much, much more of the former than the latter in “Cupcakes.” Above all, what this film has is an abundance of heart.

New England Premiere

# CUPCAKES

Wednesday, March 26 • 6:00 PM

Encore Screening - Sunday March 30, 2:00 PM

Digiplex Destinations, Bloomfield

Tickets \$11 In Advance • \$14 At Door



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