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# THE ARENA OF MURDER

(ZIRAT HA'REZACH) P. 92

(ISRAELI - DOCU)

An Agav Films production. Produced by Ilan Moscovich. Executive producer, Amos Gitai.

Directed, written by Amos Gitai. Camera (color), Jorge Gurevich, Jean-Paul Toraille; editor, Oren Medics; music, Simon Stockhausen; sound, Samuel Cohen, Amos Zipori. Reviewed at Toronto Film Festival, Sept. 7, 1996. Running time: 80 MIN.

With: Lea Rabin, Aviv Geffen, Samuel Calderon, David Cohen, Dalit Kahan, Efratia Gitai, Avner Hachohen, Uri Simchoni.

**A**mos Gitai's aptly titled "The Arena of Murder" is a solid, often moving meditation on the intellectual and emotional climate in Israel, following the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in November. Structured as a journey through Tel-Aviv, Gaza and the Golan Heights, docu interweaves conversations with Rabin's widow, military commanders, artists and civilians. Result is a quiet, pensive, mosaic-like film that should appeal to audiences interested in Israel's turbulent politics.

Gitai, one of Israel's most prominent and prolific filmmakers, is a sabra who fought in the 1973 Yom Kippur War, during which his helicopter was shot down by the Syrians. This traumatic incident, which he managed to record with a Super-8 camera up until the crash, has obviously left some deep scars, as well as needs to raise some existential questions about the intensity of everyday life in Israel.

Exploring the country in the post-Rabin era, docu begins with a three-part interview with Rabin's dignified widow, Lea, who talks about his strong desire for peace and the forces that opposed him. She recalls her late husband's comfortable, relaxed manner in issues of personal security, a negligence that ultimately cost him his life. But containing her anger, she's still optimistically hopeful about peace in the Middle East.

A rock concert by Aviv Geffen, Israel's pop star — and the last person to be embraced by Rabin — is then contrasted with affecting interviews with Uri Simchoni, commander of the paratroop division in the 1973 war, and Avner Hachohen, a lieutenant general, who also shares his memories of that war, which signaled a new chapter in the state's politics.

What makes the reflexive meditation somewhat more personal is the integration of the filmmaker himself into the collage. Gitai recalls how, as an architecture student in the 1970s, he felt a strong need to do something "more immediate," which led to a filmmaking career. Throughout his film, helmer is seen driving and filming modern city life: traffic jams, graffiti that's mostly political, random but revelatory chats with strangers and friends.

Docu reconstructs the country's shocking reaction to the assassination just seconds after it was broadcast, and the spontaneous collective support for Rabin's peace efforts that followed. Actress Hanna Schygulla lends her resonant voice to the reading of some abstract slogans.

As a colorful montage of images and sounds, "The Arena of Murder" is not particularly profound or probing, but it captures effectively the mood of a country at a unique, terribly sad, historical moment.

—Emanuel Levy