

Paper Bride
A musical play
By Nava Semel
Music: Daniel Salomon
Director: Tsedi Zarfati

**Opening: December 1st 2013, The First Festival for New Israeli Musicals,
 under the auspices of Bat- Yam Municipality,
 with the Ra'anna Symphony orchestra.**



Synopsis

Paper Bride takes place in 1935 in Palestine under the British Mandate on the eve of World War II, before the Arab revolt, events that changed the course of our history forever. The play focuses on a romantic triangle: **Anna**, a beautiful woman from Poland; **Imri**, an idealistic man from a Jewish village and Major **Charles Timothy Parker**, a British pilot stationed at the Royal Air Force base nearby.

The story begins with fictitious marriage. Imri leaves for Poland on a Zionist mission. He has agreed to marry women who are complete strangers, in order to produce a legal immigration certificate for them. In the 1930s, such arranged marriages allowed more Jews to enter Palestine, thus circumventing the strict British quota laws. Imri's future nuptials are naturally bound to be short, as they will end in a quick divorce. Everything has been carefully arranged with the blessing of the Rabbis who assist in the scheme. Imri's plan, however, goes sadly awry, when he falls in love with Anna, the first of his "paper brides". Since they must divorce, Imri leaves Anna at the care of his younger brother **Uzik**, a wild orphan, who adores the movies and takes pictures all the time. Imri had promised to return after his missions are fulfilled and marry Anna for real.

Since his early days Uzik is tended by two Arabs who live with him and Imri under the same roof, as family. **Mohammed** is Uzik's role model, and Fatma his younger sister, struggles to avoid an arranged marriage to a wealthy old man she does not love.

Eventually, she becomes Anna's closest friend. They make a living from the honey business.

Following Imri and Anna's divorce, Anna is slowly adjusting to her new life in the Jewish village, so different from what she had known in Europe. She keeps writing letters to her family in Poland, urging them to follow her and immigrate to Palestine. Having herself experienced anti-Semitism after the rise of Nazism, she foresees a dark future for the Jews of Europe. On her daily trips to the beehives, Anna meets the handsome British pilot. Uzik witnesses the relationship that develops between the tall, mysterious European woman and the aristocratic Englishman who misses his homeland so much.

Major Parker cannot wait for the moment his tour of duty is completed, so that he can leave the dust and heat of Palestine and the troubles of its people.

Imri's second marriage on paper also does not run as smoothly as planned. **Tonka**, his second "Paper Bride" falls madly in love with him and refuses to grant him a divorce. Imri's romantic future with Anna is now at risk. Major Parker steps into the emotional vacuum created by this crisis and he begins to court his "Lady Ann" openly.

One day Uzik discovers that Anna's wedding chest is filled with pistols. He realizes that his brother is not only undertaking fictitious marriages in the name of Zionism, but is also secretly smuggling weapons. Uzik hides the guns in the beehives before the British authorities discover them.

Soon the guns are found by Mohammed, who decides to bury them so no one can use them.

When Major Parker invites Anna and Uzik to join him to the cinema and a beachfront café in Tel Aviv, the boy observes the couple dancing a romantic Tango.

The British pilot begs Anna to marry him and leave Palestine and its problems behind her.

An attack by the Jewish underground on the British base has gone seriously wrong and the British soldiers smash Uzik's house searching for illegal weapons, but luckily the pistols have already disappeared.

Following Imri's attempt to beg Tonka for a divorce, he is arrested by the British.

Mohammed's life is also threatened by the "Az-Adin-El Khasam Gang" - a militant Arab group who want to drive all Jews out of Palestine by force.

Uzik decides to ask Major Parker for help. In a noble gesture the English pilot helps his rival regain his freedom, although knowing full well he will certainly be losing his beloved Anna forever.

The play ends with a painful farewell. Mohammed is leaving Palestine for good. Soon he will cross the Jordan River and forge a new life for himself and Fatma, far away from the Arab extremists who threaten to kill him because he has been assisting the Jews.

Finally, Uzik convinces Tonka to grant his brother a divorce and just before Anna is about to return to Europe, Imri suddenly arrives and the lovers fall into each other's arms.

Marriage in the service of one's country, giving up home, family and mother tongue.

Uzik who admires the movies so much, wonders whether the tale of his youth is really a happy ending like the ones he sees on the big screen. The boy must face the bitter reality about the price people pay for choosing a secured place and for the rest of his life he will live with a deep sense of loss.

The novel *Paper Bride* was originally published by Am Oved Publishing House, Israel, 1996. It was also published in Romania 2000, Germany 2003, where it was short listed for the best YA book Award in 2005. English edition by Hybrid Publishers Australia, 2012.

