

Frames of Influence

Anouar Sedki, the frustrated star of the film *I Sacrifice My Honor*, vents his pent-up rage at the film's director, Kayro Jacobi. "It's always like that with you others," Sedki barks. "We, the Egyptians . . . you duped us, you cheated us out of our salary, you made us wait long hours in dressing rooms and stifling studios, you insulted us with your arrogance. But everything comes to an end, and one day—"

Jacobi interrupts, "What do you mean by 'you others'? Explain."

"You others, *khawagat*."

Jacobi responds, "*Khawalat*? No one has ever done that to me."¹

Sedki and Jacobi are characters in a novel by Paula Jacques, *Kayro Jacobi, juste avant l'oublie* (*Kayro Jacobi, Just before Oblivion*, 2010). The eponymous character, a Jewish Egyptian cinema director and producer, was inspired by the life and work of Togo Mizrahi.²

For her francophone readers, Jacques glosses the colloquial Arabic word play between actor and director as follows: "*khawagat* = foreigners; *khawalat* = inverts [*sic*], homosexuals."³ In this scene, set in 1952, the fictional actor, Anouar Sedki, spouts Egyptian nationalist-inflected stereotypes at the Jewish director, calling him a duplicitous *khawaga*. Kayro Jacobi parries the actor's use of the epithet "*khawagat*" with the queer "*khawalat*." Jacobi's retort mimics the way Togo Mizrahi disarmed exclusionary nationalist discourses with the pluralist, queer Levantine. The scene succinctly indexes both the historical context—the inimical environment for Jews in Egypt in the mid-twentieth century—and Jacobi's/Mizrahi's queer Levantine cinematic idiom.

The novel is framed by the voice of Norma Jacobi, who laments her husband's drift into obscurity. In a chapter dated January 2007, Norma muses: "Kayro Jacobi was a first-class artist. It is a fact. And then what? What place does he now occupy in the cruel memory of history? Nowhere. Nothing. *Fini*."⁴ *Kayro Jacobi* traces the historical and cultural forces that led to the mass emigration of the majority of Egyptian Jews in the mid-twentieth century, and reflects upon its costs on the

personal level. The novel is part of Jacques's efforts to preserve Egyptian Jewish cultural heritage through her literature.⁵ *Kayro Jacobi* particularly aims to rescue Togo Mizrahi's reputation from oblivion.

Togo Mizrahi's slide into obscurity was not merely a function of his departure from Egypt, or of the passage of time. For a time, Egyptian authorities actively sought to disassociate Togo Mizrahi's name from his films. But Mizrahi's movies were not forgotten. With the advent of television in Egypt in 1960, the state broadcast service regularly aired feature films.⁶ Even at the height of the conflict between Egypt and Israel, the films of the accused Zionist sympathizer Togo Mizrahi played on Egyptian state television. Although they excised Togo Mizrahi's name from the credits of his films, the Egyptian broadcast authorities did not ban the films themselves.⁷ To the contrary, Egyptian state television continued to broadcast Mizrahi's movies. These broadcasts both satisfied existing demand for Mizrahi's films and introduced new audiences to his movies decades after their production.

After the 1979 peace accord between Egypt and Israel, Egyptian television ceased censoring Togo Mizrahi's name. Filmmaker Ahmad Kamil Mursi, a protégé of Togo Mizrahi, recalls seeing a broadcast of *Layla fi al-zalam* (*Layla in the Dark*, 1944) in 1979 that listed Mizrahi's name in the credits. "At that moment," Mursi writes, "I thought that things had finally been made right."⁸

Recognizing that the restoration of Mizrahi's credits on state television signaled a broader domestic policy shift, Mursi set out to rehabilitate the reputation of his former mentor. He published a laudatory retrospective of Mizrahi's career in the cinema journal *Al-Sinima wa-l-nas* (*Cinema and the People*). Focusing on Mizrahi's artistic accomplishments as a director and his business acumen as a producer, Mursi wrests the man's legacy from the politics of the Arab–Israeli conflict. Mursi writes that Mizrahi was "a Jew by religion" but "an authentic Egyptian artist."⁹ Having worked in Mizrahi's studio, Mursi was aware of Mizrahi's contributions to building an Egyptian cinema industry. He sought to set the record straight, and to give Mizrahi the credit due to him.

This book, *Togo Mizrahi and the Making of Egyptian Cinema*, has aimed to rescue Mizrahi's reputation from obscurity by documenting the myriad ways Mizrahi contributed to the development of Egyptian cinema in the 1930s and 1940s. The press in Mizrahi's day amply covered his efforts and their impact. However, tracking Mizrahi's lasting influence is a less straightforward endeavor. One could point to the members of the Togo cinema family—people like 'Abd al-Halim Nasr, Mahmud Nasr, and Ahmad Kamil Mursi, who continued to make movies in Egypt for decades after Mizrahi's departure. To illustrate Mizrahi's lasting impact in the realm of cinema, I have selected a series of "frames of influence"—screenshots from visual media—produced between the 1950s and the 2000s in Egypt, Israel, and Syria. This admittedly idiosyncratic selection attempts to provide a sense of the temporal scope and geographic scale of Mizrahi's impact. The first frame of influence speaks to Mizrahi's continued influence on Egyptian cinema even after

his departure. The other examples map Mizrahi's influence on filmmakers beyond Egypt's borders.

FRAME 1: *HASAN AND MARIKA* (EGYPT, 1959)

The effort to erase or downplay Togo Mizrahi's contributions to Egyptian cinema played out in a number of spheres in Egypt—not just on state television. In 1967, critic Samir Farid gave an interview in which he divided Egyptian cinema production into two schools: an Alexandria school associated solely with Togo Mizrahi; and a Cairo school associated with all the major filmmakers of Egyptian cinema's golden age. As I argued in chapter 1, Farid's characterization of the two schools effectively relegates Mizrahi's oeuvre to the sidelines of Egyptian film history. But despite Farid's contentions, elements of the Levantine cinematic idiom that Togo Mizrahi championed continued to live on in Egyptian cinema—an idiom perhaps best personified by the prolific and beloved comic actor Isma'il Yasin.

Throughout his long career, Isma'il Yasin embraced and perpetuated the comic tradition of his mentors, Fawzi al-Gazayirli and 'Ali al-Kassar. Isma'il Yasin began his career as a monologist and singing comic,¹⁰ and featured in early Egyptian radio broadcasts.¹¹ In 1935, Yasin joined 'Ali al-Kassar's troupe, an affiliation that lasted over a decade. Yasin then made his first forays into cinema with members of Fawzi al-Gazayirli's troupe.

In the 1940s, Isma'il Yasin was featured in three films directed by Togo Mizrahi. Yasin appeared alongside 'Ali al-Kassar in two costume comedies directed by Mizrahi: *'Ali Baba wa-l-arba'in harami* (*Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*, 1942), and *Nur al-Din wa-l-bahhara al-thalatha* (*Nur al-Din and the Three Sailors*, 1944). Yasin also appeared in Mizrahi's pastoral comedy *Tahiya al-sitat* (*Long Live Women*, 1944) and makes a cameo appearance in *Al-Tariq al-mustaqim* (*The Straight Road*, 1943).

Beginning in 1954, Isma'il Yasin appeared in a string of films in which—like Chalom and Layla Murad—he played an eponymous character who shared the actor's screen name.¹² Yasin is also remembered for cross-dressing on-screen. Indeed, one critic writes that Yasin “institutionalized the role of drag queen” in Egyptian cinema with his performance in *Al-Anisa Hanafi* (*Miss Hanafi*, Fatin 'Abd al-Wahab, 1954)¹³. But *Miss Hanafi* was neither Yasin's first appearance in drag, nor his last.

In the 1959 film *Hasan wa-Marika* (*Hasan and Marika*, Hasan al-Sayfi), Isma'il Yasin's cross-dressing takes on a distinctly Levantine character. Two Egyptian, and nominally Muslim, men, Hasan (Isma'il Yasin) and Fahlawi ('Abd al-Salam al-Nablusi), are competing for the affections of Marika (Maha Sabri), a Greek Egyptian woman. But the young woman's father, Yanni (Stefan Rosti), has other ideas. He imports a prospective husband from Greece. Hasan plots ways to disrupt this match. In one scene, Hasan dresses as a lower-class Egyptian woman and offers Yanni his services as a maid. Hasan is seeking to enter the apartment in order to court Marika. Instead, Hassan attracts Yanni's affections (fig. 47).



FIGURE 47. Yanni (Stefan Rosti, left) leans in to kiss Hasan (Isma'il Yassin), who is dressed as a woman. Screenshot from *Hasan and Marika* (Hasan al-Sayfi, 1958).

In *Hasan and Marika*, critic Joel Gordon sees a “society in transition,” as Greek-Egyptians begin to emigrate en masse, like the Italians and Jews before them.¹⁴ Following the 1956 Suez conflict, Gordon can find “virtually no characters we might identify as representative of the once thriving minority populations” in Egyptian cinema, with the exception of *Hasan and Marika*.¹⁵

Hasan and Marika’s Levantine cinematic idiom, with its plot of mistaken identity, and Yasin’s comic style reflect Togo Mizrahi’s influence. Contrary to Samir Farid’s claim, Togo Mizrahi’s “Alexandria school” of filmmaking was not a dead end. The queer Levantine cinematic idiom that Mizrahi cultivated lives on in Yasin’s films. Even as identifiably Levantine characters disappeared from the screen, Yasin persisted. Isma’il Yasin continued to perform his signature comic style with its queer Levantine inflections until just before his death in 1972.

FRAME 2: CINEMA EGYPT (ISRAEL, 1998)

Togo Mizrahi’s influence is readily apparent in Rami Kimchi’s documentary *Sinema mitsrayim* (*Cinema Egypt*, 1998). This biographical film traces the life of Kimchi’s mother, Henriette Azar, a Jew born in Mit Ghamr, a small city in the Nile Delta, who, as a youth, moves to the Egyptian city of Alexandria, and then immigrates to Israel in the 1950s. In retelling his mother’s story, Kimchi intercuts clips from Mizrahi’s *Layla the Country Girl* (1941; chap. 6). For Kimchi, Layla’s move from an Egyptian village to Cairo in *Layla the Country Girl* functions as an analogue to Henriette’s move from the Nile Delta to the city of Alexandria.



FIGURE 48. Poster in Hebrew for Togo Mizrahi's *Layla the Country Girl*, featuring Layla Murad. Screenshot from *Cinema Egypt* (Rami Kimchi, 1998).

Kimchi and his mother had a fraught relationship in his youth, but they forged a bond by watching television together, particularly Israeli television's weekly Friday-afternoon broadcasts of Arab movies.¹⁶ Kimchi relates that when he was a film student, his mother would expectantly ask him his opinion about classic Egyptian films they watched together. At the time, he dismissed them as “stupid and made in poor taste.” In retrospect, he realizes that as an “arrogant cinema student,” he failed to appreciate what his mother loved about the movies. He concedes: “Now I know that Mother revealed to me then her most vulnerable feelings—the loves of her childhood that she was forced to turn her back on all these years.” The title of the film comes from the name of the cinema—Cinema Misr—located across the street from Henriette's childhood home in Mit Ghamr, where, from her bedroom, she would listen to the movies as she went to sleep at night.

Cinema Egypt is Kimchi's effort to make amends with his mother, to come to terms with his family history, and to reconsider his prior disdain for Egyptian cinema. Kimchi rents out a shuttered Israeli cinema, Cinema Armon, and arranges a private screening for his mother. The film they watch is *Layla the Country Girl*. On the empty marquee, Kimchi hangs a poster, in Hebrew, for the screening (fig. 48). For Kimchi and his mother, *Layla the Country Girl* serves as a point of connection between generations. In the documentary, Kimchi muses that Togo Mizrahi's film provides the only surviving remnant of the cosmopolitan world his mother inhabited in Egypt.

FRAME 3: *PASSION* (SYRIA, 2005)

Muhammad Malas's 2005 film *Bab al-maqam* (*Passion*), set in Aleppo, tells the story of Iman (Salwa Jamil), a woman who loves to sing. Her passion: the songs of Umm Kulthum. Visually and thematically, *Passion* owes little (or nothing) to the idioms of commercial Egyptian genre cinema. Mizrahi's influence is evident nonetheless.

The film is based on events documented in the Syrian press about a woman murdered by male relatives. To her suspicious uncle, brother, and cousins, her love of singing was an irrefutable sign that she had committed adultery. In addition to the film's powerful indictment of honor killings, critic Samirah Alkassim also sees the film levying a critique of the "metaphoric murder of culture happening in Syria and the Arab world at large." Alkassim reads the film as a national allegory for Syria, a country "dishonorably killed by its leaders and political systems."¹⁷ This criticism is effected through a nostalgic pan-Arab lens. In one scene, protesters against the American invasion of Iraq in 2003 hold up posters of Gamal Abdel Nasser, recalling a unified pan-Arab identity prior to the Baathist dictatorships.

This transnational and nostalgic orientation is evident in *Passion's* representation of Arab musical traditions of the past as well. The record shop where Iman meets Badi'a, a retired wedding singer, is adorned with images of musicians long deceased. One wall features photographs of local early-twentieth-century masters of *tarab*: 'Ali Darwish, 'Umar al-Batsh, and Bakri al-Kurdi.¹⁸ Another wall is adorned with photographs of Umm Kulthum, Muhammad 'Abd al-Wahab, Layla Murad, and Asmahan. These musical stars, who recorded in Egypt, have enduring, transnational appeal.

In a romantic interlude in *Passion*, Iman's husband (Usama al-Sayyid Yusuf) implores her to sing "Ghani li shwaya shwaya" ("Sing to Me Little by Little") (fig. 49). Umm Kulthum debuted this song in Togo Mizrahi's film *Sallama* (1945) (chap. 7). *Sallama* features Umm Kulthum in the role of a *qayna*, a singing slave girl. As discussed in the previous chapter, critic Marlé Hammond has argued that *Sallama* vociferously defends the idea that women's singing in public is permissible according to Islamic teachings.¹⁹ Hammond's argument derives from her reading of the scene where *Sallama* finds her voice. At the outset of the film, *Sallama* serves as a simple *jariyya*, a domestic slave. Her owner, Abu Wafa', takes the strident position that women's voices should not be heard in public. When Abu Wafa' catches *Sallama* singing in public, he rashly vows to sell her. 'Abd al-Rahman al-Qass, the respectable young man who has captured *Sallama's* heart, counsels restraint, advocating for the permissibility of women singing. In *Sallama*, what provokes the debate about women singing in public is this same song, "Sing to Me Little by Little." Umm Kulthum recorded hundreds of songs over the course of her career. Malas chose this song for Iman to sing to her husband in a moment of intimacy on the night before she is murdered.

Even though throughout the film Iman sings only in the privacy of her apartment, her voice carries out the windows, into the stairwell and garden of



FIGURE 49. Iman (Salwa Jamil) sings “Sing to Me Little by Little.” Screenshot from *Passion* (Muhammad Malas, 2005).

the building, and beyond into the street, where it reaches the ears of her spying uncle. The heinous act carried out by Iman’s male relatives in *Passion* is provoked by the same male logic employed by Abu Wafa’ in *Sallama*: that a woman’s singing voice audible in public is objectionable. Referencing Togo Mizrahi’s *Sallama*, Muhammad Malas’s *Passion* levies an affective critique of patriarchal control over women’s bodies and voices.

FRAME 4: YOUTUBE

The final image captures not only a film, but also the frame through which the film is viewed. YouTube has become the medium of choice for disseminating classic Egyptian films. By any measure, Togo Mizrahi’s films command an impressive audience on streaming media.

Counting the number of films that pop up on streaming Internet video sites and tallying the number of views is, to be sure, a highly speculative and anecdotal measure of enduring popularity. Although streaming media provides an invaluable resource for scholars and aficionados of early Egyptian cinema alike, it is an unstable format. Films are posted haphazardly, and many are removed suddenly, without notice. YouTube may track views for the duration of a posting, but for scholars, the way users employ the platform to post old Arabic movies doesn’t generate reliable statistics of viewership over the long term.

With that caveat, a quick scan of viewer statistics on YouTube nevertheless provides ample evidence of the enduring popularity of Mizrahi’s films. *Layla the*



FIGURE 50. 'Ali al-Kassar (center) and Ahmad al-Haddad (left) in *'Usman and 'Ali* (Togo Mizrahi, 1938). Screen capture from YouTube, 28 May 2019.

Schoolgirl (1941), starring Layla Murad, garnered over 19,000 views over a period of eight months.²⁰ Mizrahi's Chalom and 'Abdu comedy *The Two Delegates* (1934) was viewed nearly 30,000 times in a year and a half.²¹ The ever-popular Umm Kulthum racked up over 140,000 views for *Sallama* during a two-and-a-half-year period.²² Between January 2016 and May 2019, Mizrahi's film *'Usman and 'Ali* (1938) was viewed over a million times (fig. 50).²³

The availability of films streaming on the Internet is closely connected to television broadcasts. As already noted, Togo Mizrahi's films regularly screened on Egyptian television in the 1970s. By the mid-1990s, when I started collecting videos of Egyptian films, Togo Mizrahi's movies were sufficiently popular to warrant the release of several titles on VHS. In the early 2000s many of Mizrahi's films were sold on VCD or DVD. The media conglomerate Rotana released a restored and subtitled DVD of *Layla the Schoolgirl*. Classic Egyptian films, including Mizrahi's movies, also continue to be broadcast on local television stations in Arab countries, satellite networks, and subscription services. Films are posted to YouTube by viewers who capture and upload videos, many of which bear the logos of the channels from which the unauthorized copy was made. In both absolute and relative terms, Mizrahi's films are well represented on YouTube.

Mizrahi was a prolific filmmaker. Compounding his productivity is the fact that a remarkable percentage of Mizrahi's films survived into the television era. In the 1930s, Togo Mizrahi directed sixteen films—two silent and fourteen sound. Nine

of Mizrahi's fourteen sound films from the 1930s have survived and are readily viewable on YouTube for anyone with an Internet connection. By contrast, in the same decade Muhammad Karim directed five films—one silent and four sound. Of these 1930s films, Karim's three blockbuster musicals starring Muhammad 'Abd al-Wahab have survived. Assia Dagher's Lotus Films produced eight sound films in the 1930s, all directed by Ahmad Galal; only two have been made available to stream on the Internet. In the same decade, the Lama brothers' Condor Films produced nine films; none are available.²⁴

There is an element of luck and good fortune in the survival rate of Mizrahi's films. Ibrahim Lama's studio experienced two fires, one in 1942 and the other in 1951; on both occasions, the films in production were destroyed and had to be reshot.²⁵ Other Lama brothers films may have been lost to the conflagrations as well, and hence would not have survived into the era of television broadcast. Although Studio Mizrahi did not experience loss on that scale, two of Mizrahi's films are known to have caught fire in the course of screenings.²⁶ While Mizrahi was attuned to the flammability of nitrocellulose, he also viewed the medium as safe when handled with proper precaution. When the Egyptian Ministry of the Interior opened an inquiry about the safety of film, Mizrahi insisted that audiences could be kept safe if cinemas agreed to employ two projectionists who could, between them, remain vigilant during screenings.²⁷

Not only is nitrocellulose highly flammable; it also decomposes and has proven difficult to preserve. Over the long and celebrated history of the cinema industry, there has been no sustained, centralized effort to properly store and systematically archive film in Egypt.²⁸ According to one estimate, as much as 50 percent of Egypt's cinema heritage has been lost.²⁹ Even the films that survive have deteriorated due to poor storage conditions. Given this situation, it is quite remarkable how many of Togo Mizrahi's films are still available to be watched today.

Popularity alone does not explain why Mizrahi's films survived the punishing effects of time and poor storage conditions. But popularity does account for the continued availability of Mizrahi's films in a variety of formats. Mizrahi's movies are still screened on classic-film stations, and uploaded to YouTube by viewers who enjoy them and wish to share them. To this day, Togo Mizrahi's movies are watched by hundreds of thousands—if not millions—of viewers around the globe.

WRITING TOGO MIZRAHI INTO THE HISTORY OF EGYPTIAN CINEMA

In 1942, Mizrahi published an article in *Al-Sabah* entitled "Tarikh al-sinema fi Misr" ("The History of Egyptian Cinema").³⁰ The article is in part history, and in part a snapshot of the vibrancy of the Egyptian cinema industry at the time. The article begins, "Cinema production in Egypt began before the Great War. In 1913 [*sic*] the first studio was established in Alexandria at 3 Nuzha Street."³¹ Films in the

first two decades of the twentieth century were produced in glass structures and were lit by sunlight, and Mizrahi notes that the conditions in Egypt were advantageous for cinema production. Mizrahi relates that an Italian company founded the first studio and production company in Egypt, SITCIA, but that the effort was short-lived. He then honors 'Ali al-Kassar, 'Aziza Amir, and Muhammad Karim as well as the Lama brothers for their contributions to cinema production in the 1920s.³² According to Mizrahi, since the establishment of the cinema industry in its then-current form—beginning, in his estimation, in 1929—it had become an important engine for the Egyptian economy.³³

Mizrahi doesn't get all of the historical facts straight: 'Aziz Bandarli and Umberto Dorés established a studio in 1907: SITCIA (the Italian Cinematographic Society) was founded in 1917.³⁴ However, the article provides insights into how Mizrahi viewed Egyptian cinema history. Mizrahi identifies Alexandria as the site of the first locally produced films. By Mizrahi's account, the studio era starts in 1929, before the establishment of Studio Misr in 1934. Mizrahi also sees foreigners and noncitizen residents as an integral part of the history of Egyptian cinema. By contrast, the dominant narratives of Egyptian cinema history are Cairo-centric and narrowly define what it means for a film to be considered "Egyptian."

The second half of the article reflects Mizrahi's public-relations efforts on behalf of the cinema industry as a whole. In 1942, according to Mizrahi, there were twenty film-production companies in Egypt, ten of which were committed to producing films full-time and year-round. The six active studios operated a total of ten sound stages, and between them employed approximately one thousand people, including hundreds of artisans and technicians. By Mizrahi's accounting, the industry poured 500,000 Egyptian pounds into the economy annually, and paid 40,000 Egyptian pounds to the government in taxes.³⁵

According to Mizrahi, locally produced films dominated the cinemas, especially outside of the big cities—although it is worth noting that World War II suppressed distribution of Hollywood and European films in Egypt, and imports of foreign films resumed after the war. Mizrahi cites international demand for Egyptian films as another marker of the industry's success. He provides a long list of countries where Egyptian films were distributed in 1942: Sudan, Iraq, Iran, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Transjordan, Turkey, India, and Somalia. The war, Mizrahi notes, also temporarily halted distribution of Egyptian films to Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Ethiopia, and Libya. Mizrahi also celebrates that some films found an audience across the ocean in Brazil, Argentina, and the United States. Mizrahi caps off his boosterism of the film industry by signing the article as member of the board of directors of the Egyptian Chamber of Commerce, Giza Directorate.

Mizrahi was too modest to write himself into the narrative of Egyptian cinema history. In this article—and in his other published pieces—Mizrahi takes credit neither for his role in the founding of the industry, nor for his contributions to its subsequent growth. Nevertheless, Togo Mizrahi played an active role

in developing the cinema industry in Egypt in the 1930s and 1940s. Mizrahi was involved in efforts to establish professional syndicates in cinema. He used his influence to lobby parliament for industry protection. As a business owner, he joined the chamber of commerce to advocate on behalf of the local cinema industry. When he spoke to the press, he used his fame not to promote his own films, but rather to represent the industry as a whole. In his published essays, he touted the achievements of Egyptian cinema, and raised public awareness of issues hampering the development of the Egyptian cinema industry, particularly drawing attention to the challenges facing independent studios. He also used the press to pressure cinemas to screen more locally produced films, and to engage in business practices that would encourage development of a range of local idioms. Mizrahi always cast his promotion of cinema's cultural and economic potential in patriotic terms. Mizrahi viewed his role as director, producer, and studio owner as contributing to the endeavor of building a viable and vibrant film industry in Egypt in the 1930s and 1940s.

The success of Mizrahi's films can, in part, be attributed to his ability to attract some of the best talent in Egypt—both in front of and behind the camera. He brought to the silver screen popular veteran actors of the stage, like 'Ali al-Kassar, Fawzi al-Gazayirli, Yusuf Wahbi, and Amina Rizq. Mizrahi's musicals featured some of the top recording stars of the era. He directed what is widely regarded as Umm Kulthum's best performance on-screen. Mizrahi's name is closely linked to Layla Murad, who, over the five films they made together, became a huge box-office success. He fostered the performances of actors whose careers blossomed in the 1940s and 1950s, such as Isma'il Yasin, Tahiya Carioca, 'Aqila Ratab, and Anwar Wagdi. All of these stars continue to draw audiences today.

Mizrahi was a skilled craftsman and astute businessman, whose attention to detail was put in the service of producing entertainment. Mizrahi directed many box-office hits, and his films were widely praised by critics. He wrote, directed, and produced socially conscious comedies and melodramas. While his big-budget musicals peddle escapist fantasies of wealth and luxury, these films, too, engage in social and cultural critique. But more than that, Mizrahi made movies that are satisfying to watch.

The influence of Mizrahi's cinematic idiom is evident in Egyptian filmmaking long after he wrapped production on his last movie in 1946. His work continues to influence filmmakers and writers outside of Egypt. As the contemporaneous box-office successes and contemporary popularity on YouTube attest, Togo Mizrahi produced movies with enduring audience appeal. The Egyptian films of this Jewish Italian Egyptian filmmaker continue to delight generations of audiences in Egypt and around the world.