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REVIEW: JIYAN

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## The walking wounded

*The Kurdish-American benefactor of "Jiyan" arrives in northern Iraq to build a new orphanage, where Saddam's heinous poison gas attack has become Kurds' defining moment, but it's the going forward part that will determine their future.*

By [DAVID LIPPERT](#)  
Offoffoff.com

Kurdish-American director Jano Rosebiani has the honor of making the first important feature to emerge from the Kurdish Regional Government area in northern Iraq. At least that's what it was called until a few weeks ago. The conditions depicted in "Jiyan" ("Life") may prove to be idyllic.

The action takes place in Halabja about five years after of Saddam's infamous poison gas attack in 1988. Diyari (Kurdo Galali) has come from his new homeland, America, with enough cash to put up a badly needed new orphanage.

### JIYAN

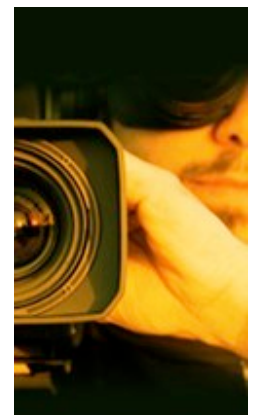
Written and directed by: **Jano Rosebiani**.  
Cast: **Kurdo Galali, Pisheng Berzinji, Choman Hawrami, Enwer Shexani, Darya Qadir, Rubar Ehmed**.  
In Kurdish with English subtitles.

Related links: [Official site](#)

### SCHEDULE

[Walter Reade Theater](#) Lincoln Center, 65th St.  
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Wed.. June 18, 2003. 3:30 p.m. Thu.. June 19, 2003.

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As construction proceeds, he gradually becomes acquainted with the tragic individual stories of the survivors. Prime among these is orphan girl Jiyan (Pisheng Berzinji), whose one-side-beautiful one-side-disfigured face epitomizes the people's plight.

Little by little, Diyari succeeds in turning her fixed stare into natural friendliness. Lively young cousin Sherko (Choman Hawrami) is primed to marry her, even though they are hardly of age.

Although he seems to fit right into life in this impoverished town, Diyari hardly can absorb the catastrophe that hit there. Every time he imagines the gas attack, he breaks out into a sweat. Nor can he, coming from America, readily accept the level of injury from land mines and disease that he encounters when he arrives. Many glasses of tea later, the orphanage is ready and Diyari says his goodbyes, plunging Jiyan back into quiet despair. The audience will readily sympathize, because Rosebiani manages to show enough other people of Halabja with distinct personalities to make the film memorable.



"Jiyan" seems to be several films at once. The main story just outlined gets a reverently sentimental distancing treatment while Diyari's more formal contacts with local officialdom feel more like a staged documentary with jerky script as co-conspirator.

The best scenes involve the romances and infatuations of a trio of young ladies living across from Diyari, who is embarrassed but flattered by their attention. For its lack of artifice, emphasis on children and liberal use of non-actors, the film will strike many as similar to Iranian efforts or even Turkish imagery. Most important — and landscape aside — it doesn't look like classic Arabic films, and this is most likely intentional.

Rosebiani makes his strongest points when emphasizing the Kurds' pre-Islamic cultural roots.

9:00 p.m. Fri., June 20, 2003, 4:00 p.m.

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Zoroastrian traditions such as celebrating New Year's on the first day of spring as in neighboring Iran and love of music easily trump the later Wahabbi-



influenced thinking. One character in the film voices these conflicts, specifically criticizing a lonely widower who passes his life on a low rooftop playing a ney flute. A neighborhood woman promptly shoos him away as if to demonstrate that his conservative thinking could take root only with the greatest difficulty. It's no accident that among Diyari's portable library is Nietzsche's "Zarathustra" (Zoroaster) with its description of Ahura Mazda, precursor to Jewish, Christian and Muslim concepts of one God. If Rosebani continues clarifying Kurdish culture in the remaining components of a proposed trilogy, he will accomplish much more than one more time evoking compassion for Kurdish victimhood.

JUNE 13, 2003

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