

BY JASON STEIN

THERE is no question that Azazel Jacobs tows the 'party-line' when it comes to Jewish comedians.

"Larry David — he is all of our heroes," exclaimed the 42-year-old filmmaker.

Yet the American is hoping to make his very own mark on the comedy landscape as director of upcoming television show, *Doll & Em*.

Based on a lifelong friendship, it sees actresses Emily Mortimer and Dolly Wells play fictionalised versions of themselves.

Emily stars as a high-flying actress and, given that she is currently in the midst of a career high after her starring role in HBO drama *The Newsroom*, that is certainly true in real-life. Dolly plays her assistant.

According to Azazel, the six-part series, which will air on Sky Living next month, has been a long time coming.

"I've known Dolly and Emily for quite a while and we've always talked about doing something together," Azazel revealed.

"It was actually them who came to me with the idea and

Those Jewish influences all over the place

what I found most fascinating was they wanted to do it as a play, but I thought it would be great to handle it episodically.

"So we got the ball rolling while Emily was filming *The Newsroom* and we shot a few scenes."

Azazel grew up in New York, the son of abstract filmmaker Ken Jacobs.

His father taught film classes and Azazel was keen to follow in his footsteps.

"After finishing high school at Manhattan's Bayard Rustin High School I took an undergraduate course in Los Angeles and also went to the American Film Institute there," he recalled.

"I've been making my living as a filmmaker for the past dozen years.

Hit TV show is made just Az friends like it

PICTURE: MISCHA RICHTER



HELLO DOLLY . . . AND EM: Azazel Jacobs with his leading ladies Emily Mortimer, left, and Dolly Wells

"Thankfully, I've been fortunate enough to almost entirely focus on things I love doing."

Azazel's most notable achievements include his short film *Kirk and Kerry* winning the Grand Jury Prize for best dramatic short at the Slamdance Film Festival and his feature film *Terri* was nominated for the Grand Jury Prize at the Sundance Film Festival.

So how difficult was it to transfer his filmmaking abilities

onto the small screen?

"The pressure of TV comes with having an audience," Azazel stated.

"What I mean is that with television I am not having to make something so broad, that appeals to everyone, but make something that satisfies the audience of each channel.

"That is a lot of pressure, whereas a film kind of shifts between being independent and micro-managed or having a huge budget.

"Television is the only avenue in between."

He continued: "I've approached this no differently to a film and I didn't find things that different, other than a television show takes so much longer to develop and costs more money. But that is what I have loved.

"It's been a painstaking process of having to figure out every single specific moment in an episode.

"But they are both extremely satisfying in different ways. TV can be so compelling."

Azazel said the development of the show moved very quickly.

"We honestly had no idea how it was going to turn out and what it would be like when we were finishing in the cutting room," he said.

"My take on the show is that it is as dramatic as it is comedic.

"We wrapped up filming the day before *The Newsroom* finished and then started selling the show.

"The advantage we had was that we were selling a fully finished product. It was tangible.

"Working with the two girls has been one of these situations that has been great on so many levels.

"We've had a huge amount of support from Sky and HBO.

"And they've both been incredibly open in letting us do what we wanted to do.

"Working for both companies has been a dream come true.

"The way the show is shot and produced means I can see all the choices that Dolly and Emily are making and I can go minutely back-and-forth during each scene.

"As a director, it was everything that I was hoping for."

Semi-autobiographical television shows are fast becoming the norm in

Hollywood. And *Doll & Em* comes on the back of series' such as *Episodes* (Matt LeBlanc) and *Louis* (Louis CK) that saw actors play versions of themselves.

"There is definitely a heightened interest in people for being famous just for being famous and I think that comes into play here," Azazel commented.

"Audiences want to see what type of lives a celebrity has. And I've always been fascinated by the idea of actors or actresses playing variations of themselves and seeing how these characters blend together.

"I liked *Sunset Boulevard* for instance. These types of shows have always been such a question to me."

Also commonplace in Hollywood are Jewish personalities and Azazel holds a deep respect for his roots.

"Judaism definitely has an impact on my life and it should for most Jews," he assuredly remarked.

"Because if a Jew is not defining their own Judaism then someone else is doing it for us.

"I feel my Judaism in ways that I probably can't even recognise myself.

"Also, growing up as a Jew in New York has a huge impact, and there are so many different angles that a young Jew can pursue.

"My barmitzvah, for example, saw me learning about the Holocaust.

"It's something that is in me and guides me. Those influences are all over the place."

■ *Doll & Em* premieres on Sky Living on February 18 (10pm) and will be available to download on Sky Go from February 11.

Gabriel returns home for art exhibition

GERMAN Jews, historically, were very much assimilated into the country's society.

And one of the pastimes they took a big interest in was art.

So it is no surprise that Gabriel Klasmer — the son of German Jewish immigrants to Israel — has forged his career in the field.

"My parents were very liberal German Jews," the artist told me. "My home growing up was filled with books on art.

"I had an interest in it since early childhood. I was bad at school, but I was good at art and was always painting and drawing.

"I was fascinated by art books and well informed about the world of art."

London-based, he has been working, exhibiting and teaching since the early 1980s.

And his latest exhibition has seen him return to his native Israel, with a show at The Tel Aviv Museum of Art.

One floor is dedicated to Gabriel's paintings in a dense and didactic survey, where painting is exploring

BY SIMON YAFFE

the ground between abstraction and figuration.

Another floor is a display of sculptures, which makes use of cheap domestic and common materials, compressed and formed in to shapes of the human figure.

The third level is about inflation, expansion, of large scale air bubbles, membrane and atmosphere.

The show also includes the screening of a joint project by Gabriel and daughter Shira, a 3D video exploring time and space called *Out of Thin Air*.

Jerusalem-born Gabriel said: "The exhibition covers 30 years of activity and shows my different styles of work.

"I never usually mix my work, so this is the first time I am attempting to unify my interests into one show.

"It is a representation of my 30 years as an artist."

After he won the Clore scholarship, he came to London to study MA and

later completed a PhD research degree both at the Royal College of Art.

Gabriel's research focused on the examination of the history and status of the monochrome painting.

He represented Israel in the 23rd International Biennial of Sao Paulo and was awarded the Sandberg prize in 1990.

Gabriel was a senior tutor at the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design and a senior tutor at the RCA London.

He is in major collections of museums in Israel and in the Museum of Modern Art in New York, along with many private collections.

"My art is very abstract," Gabriel added.

The father-of-three is married to Dutch-born photographer Janny, whom he met in Israel when she worked in a hospital as a nurse.

Gabriel describes himself as "totally unreligious", but he respects religious people.

■ www.gabrielklasmer.com



EXHIBITION: Gabriel Klasmer