



For Immediate Release

Arabian Sights Returns for 29th year!

This Year's Festival to Highlight Palestinian Voices Special Guest Filmmaker Farah Nabulsi, Director of *The Teacher*

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(March 27, 2024) - WASHINGTON, DC – From April 18 through April 28, 2024, the Arabian Sights Film Festival will return for its 29th season with a selection of new and exciting films from the Arab world. Arabian Sights will be presented in conjunction with the Washington, DC International Film Festival (Filmfest DC), its umbrella organization.

Six films from various countries covering a variety of timely topics will be offered, with an additional 3 films of related interest featured in Filmfest DC's world view section. This year's films touch on the topics of Palestinian resistance, immigrants and political and social tensions, marriage, inheritance, tolerance and sexual identity, art and architecture, and traditional camel racing.

Arabian Sights strives to bring diverse, outstanding, and thought-provoking movies by both established and rising talents from the Arab world and beyond. They offer insights and a fuller picture into the social, political, and cultural issues facing the region.

Highlights this year include:

The Teacher from Palestine is directed by Farah Nabulsi. Ms. Nabulsi will be present for her screenings and will have a Q&A discussion with the audience. This multi-award-winning drama, set in occupied West Bank, is about a Palestinian school teacher (Saleh Bakri) who struggles to

reconcile his risky commitment to political resistance with his emotional support for one of his students. It is impossible not to relate the events in this film with the current conflict in Gaza.

Bye Bye Tiberias is an intimate documentary on Palestinian actress Hiam Abbass, directed by her daughter Lina Soualem. Abbass is known for her roles in numerous films such as **The Syrian Bride**, **The Visitor**, **Insyriated**, and **Rock the Casbah**; and her television roles in *Succession* (HBO) and *Ramy* (HULU).

Hajjan, from Saudi Arabia is a thrilling story about a boy who takes up camel racing to avenge his brother's death and faces several rivals. It offers a peek into the competitive world of camel racing.

Inshallah a Boy is an engrossing portrait of resistance and strength about a woman and her daughter who face destitution after the sudden passing of her husband unless she's able to give birth to a son. **Inshallah a Boy** was Jordan's submission to the Academy Awards for Best International Film. It was the first Jordanian film to compete at the Cannes Film Festival where it won two awards.

The world premiere of **Chanting of the Dunes** follows the story of Wahbi al-Hariri-Rifai, who was an accomplished international artist, architect, archeologist, and author, and the first living artist to be honored with a solo exhibition at the Smithsonian. This narrative film takes viewers on a journey through multiple countries and momentous world changes.

A complete list of films to be presented is attached along with other films of related interest.

Tickets go on sale beginning April 5. The full catalog of films will be available online and will be in a 20-page catalog insert in The Washington Post on Friday, April 12.

For more information and updates please visit: filmfestdc.org

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THE 29th ANNUAL ARABIAN SIGHTS FILM FESTIVAL

THE FOLLOWING ARABIAN SIGHTS FILMS WILL BE FEATURED:

Bye Bye Tiberias

Directed by Lina Soualem

France/Palestine, 2023, 83 minutes, In French and Arabic with English subtitles

Years after leaving her Palestinian village to follow her dreams of acting in France, Emmy nominated Hiam Abbass returns home in this intimate documentary about four generations of women and their shared legacy of separation. At the age of 23, Abbass [known for her roles in *Red Satin* (Filmfest DC 2003), *Rock the Casbah* (Filmfest DC 2014), and *Gaza Mon Amour* (Arabian Sights 2021), as well as hit television series *Succession* and *Ramy*] made the difficult decision to leave her grandmother, mother,

and seven sisters in the Palestinian village of Deir Hanna, Galilee. Years later, in collaboration with her daughter, the film's director Lina Soualem, Abbass returned to her rapidly changing childhood home. *Bye Bye Tiberius*, Palestine's Academy Awards entry, is an important film that beautifully portrays the complexity of Arab women's lives. – *Various sources*

Chanting of the Dunes

Directed by Mokhless Al-Hariri
U.S., 2024, 80 minutes

Chanting of the Dunes is a narrative film about Wahbi Al-Hariri-Rifai, who was an accomplished international artist, architect, archeologist, and author. The film is beautifully illustrated with hundreds of meticulously restored archival photographs and original footage. The storyline takes viewers on a dazzling journey through multiple countries and during momentous world changes that extend from the Levant in the 1920s to the U.S. and China in the 1990s. *Chanting of the Dunes* recounts Wahbi's life through the intimate and lyrical perspective of his wife, Widad Marachi. The narrative is accompanied by a superb soundtrack. The film showcases Wahbi's extensive artworks, including portraits, still lifes, and masterful on-site renderings of architectural monuments, from the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem to other significant sites in China, Dubai, Saudi Arabia, and Washington, DC. In 1984, Wahbi became the first living artist to be honored with a solo exhibition at the Smithsonian Institution. – *Various sources*

Goodbye Julia

Directed by Mohamed Kordofani
Sudan/Egypt/Germany/France/Saudi Arabia, 2023, 121 min, In Arabic with English subtitles

Set against the backdrop of Sudan's tumultuous final days as a unified country, *Goodbye Julia* follows the journey of a former singer haunted by guilt who seeks redemption by hiring the widow of a Southern man as her maid while concealing her true identity. Directed by Mohamed Kordofani in his award-winning directorial debut, this poignant and intimate drama delves into themes of loss and forgiveness, subtly exploring the divisions between the people of North and South Sudan that led to the country's division in 2011. Premiering at the 2023 Cannes Film Festival, *Goodbye Julia* made history as Sudan's first film to be selected, earning the Freedom Prize and a thunderous 10-minute standing ovation, cementing Kordofani's status as a compelling voice in African cinema. – *Various sources*

Hajjan

Directed by Abu Bakr Shawky
Saudi Arabia/Egypt/Jordan, 2023, 117 minutes, In Arabic with English subtitles

In the high-energy world of small-circuit camel racing, Ghanim is preparing for the Great Safwa Race—where heroes are made. Younger brother and Bedouin tailor Matar grew up hearing Ghanim recite poetry about their legendary grandfather known as “Hajjan,” the Arabic word for jockey. While following in his grandfather's footsteps and building a name for himself in a regional qualifying race, foul play cuts Ghanim's dreams short. Although Matar doesn't share

Ghanim's passion for the track, he does share a rider's love for his camel, Hofira. The devoted pair, unaware of the sprawling battle ahead of them, set out together to avenge Ghanim's fate and instead commit to an outsized fight against a regional champion. An epic journey in proportion and scope, Abu Bakr Shawky's rousing feature boasts a fabled sense of urgency backed by an evocative score and the awe-inspiring atmosphere of the Arabian desert.—*Toronto International Film Festival*

Inshallah a Boy

Directed by Amjad Al-Rasheed

Jordan, 2023, 113 minutes, In Arabic with English subtitles

Inshallah a Boy is the first Jordanian film to compete at the Cannes Film Festival and is Jordan's submission to the Academy Awards. This story of a widow who pretends she is pregnant with a boy to keep a roof over her head is a suspenseful and engrossing portrait of resistance and strength. A gripping, sharp-witted drama that follows Nawal, a mother and housewife whose husband suddenly dies unexpectedly. In the absence of legal documents, her brother-in-law swoops in under the auspices of inheritance laws to exercise his claim on not just the couple's apartment, but on guardianship of Nawal's young daughter Nora. Nawal is forced into a series of rash situations to hold onto her family and claim what should rightfully be hers. – *Various sources*

The Teacher

Directed by Farah Nabulsi

UK/Palestine/Qatar, 2023, 115 minutes, In Arabic and English with English subtitles

In Person: Director Farah Nabulsi

The Teacher is set and was evocatively filmed in the Occupied West Bank. High school English teacher (and clandestine resistance activist) Basem (Saleh Bakri) is still wounded from a past family tragedy brought on by the occupation. Now, Basem mentors one of his students Adam, who endured his own loss due to settler violence, counseling him in order to avoid prison or death by the Israelis. Scenes of the characters (whether Palestinians or via the sympathetic eyes of outsiders like Adam's British social worker Lisa) experiencing their homes being raided and demolished, in courtrooms or at the checkpoints, are dramatically effective. There is a concurrent story about an American couple's quest for the release of their Israeli soldier son being held by the resistance in exchange for the freeing of imprisoned Palestinians. This superbly acted and written mixture of compassionate personal drama and gripping political thriller is set in 2014, however the stark similarities make it inescapable to not draw parallels to the current situation. – *Cornelius Moore*

OF RELATED INTEREST:

Amal

Directed by Jawad Rhalib

Belgium, 2023, 100 minutes, In French with English subtitles

The corner of Brussels where Amal (Lubna Azabal) teaches high school might as well be a small village—everyone is in everyone’s business. Are you a secular or Muslim Belgian? Are you Muslim enough? In the classroom, the natural teenage pursuits of gossip and bullying can take on a dangerous quality as the youths expel the pressures of home life. After learning that one of her students, Monia, is being tormented by her peers for being a lesbian, Amal introduces the class to the eighth-century poet Abu Nawas, who lived and wrote as a bisexual. Threats ensue, and parents, students, and teachers take sides. Director Jawad Rhalib has both fiction and documentary works in his repertoire. Here, the young actors seem riveted around an impassioned performance by Azabal as they confront extremism’s malign effects on their generation. – *Various sources*

Les Indesirables

Directed by Ladj Ly

France/Belgium, 2023, 104 minutes, In French with English subtitles

In a Parisian suburb, two different visions for the community clash. On one side there’s pediatrician Pierre (Alexis Manenti), drafted by the leftist ruling political party to serve as interim mayor after the abrupt death of his predecessor. With old public housing towers demolished and plans for new construction under review, Pierre comes into conflict with community activist Haby (Anta Diaw), who is outraged that the proposed replacement facilities won’t be configured to accommodate large families—part of a larger push to displace migrants and other so-called “undesired” members of the community. Following his Cannes Jury Prize–winning feature debut *Les Misérables*, Ladj Ly returns with another incisive look at racial and social tensions in contemporary France, depicted with an artistry that is every bit as dynamic and urgent as the story is complex and politically nuanced. – *Film at Lincoln Center*

The Old Oak

Directed by Ken Loach

UK, 2023, 113 minutes, In English and Arabic with English subtitles

The great humanist Ken Loach in his last film is going out on a strong note. In a former mining town in northeast England, the first generation to come of age since the pits closed can barely support their own kids. When a busload of Syrian refugees arrives, the generous among them welcome a new cause while the miserable find a new scapegoat for the town’s ills. TJ Ballantyne’s rundown Old Oak Pub holds memories of long-lost solidarity and communality that the newcomers unlock. The director’s trademark nonprofessional actors give the characters a knowing dignity, while Loach regular Dave Turner wears the role of TJ like an old sweater: he’s that comfortable in it, and in Loach’s worldview. Strong newcomer Ebla Mari co-stars as the young Syrian photographer Yara, tasked with translating not only a language but the experience of exile. – *Various sources*