

October 15-24, 2004

Arabian Sights

Contemporary Arab Cinema



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Contemporary Arab Cinema

presented by

The Washington, DC International Film Festival

The Ninth Annual Arabian Sights film series offers an array of dazzling, provocative and eclectic new films from today's Arab world. These timely films show the range and commitment of directors, several of whom will be present at their screenings, who invariably manage to tell moving stories while exploring the social, religious and political issues facing their region. All films are screened with English subtitles.

Admission

Admission is \$9.00 per person for each screening.

Tickets for any film in the series may be purchased at the theater starting one hour before the first show.

Festival Pass

A special package of 10 tickets for all films is available for \$80.00. Passes may be reserved by calling 202-724-5613.

Location

All films will be shown at the Loews Cineplex Wisconsin Avenue Cinemas, 4000 Wisconsin Ave., NW. Take Metro Red Line to Tenleytown.

Parking

Available in the theater building along Upton Street for \$2.00 with a validated parking ticket.

For More Information

For more information on this series call **202-724-5613** or go to **www.filmfestdc.org**

Sponsors

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*Arabian Sights is programmed and coordinated by Shirin Ghareeb,
Assistant Director of the Washington, DC International Film Festival.*

Opening film

Sleepless Nights

★ *In Person: Director Hani Khalifa*

Friday, October 15th at 6:30 pm

Saturday, October 16th at 9:00 pm

A box-office sensation in Egypt, and a hit with critics alike, *Sleepless Nights* has been packing the movie houses, shocking audiences with its

explicit subject matter and causing a stir more for its emotional and psychological frankness than its sexually explicit subject matter. Following the lives of four young couples in crisis, the film was applauded for its frank depiction of marriage, adultery and sexual-



ity. The husbands are all childhood friends. One couple is stuck in a passionless marriage. Two of the other couples have issues of clashing class backgrounds and parental disapproval. The 4th couple is unmarried and debating their future together. The film has grossed about \$1.5 million and spawned a flood of newspaper articles debating its social significance. Heralded by critics as Egypt's return to serious and thoughtprovoking filmmaking, *Sleepless Nights* suggests a new generation is emerging capable of entertaining as well as provoking local audiences.

(Egypt, Directed by Hani Khalifa, 2003, 129 minutes)

AMERICAN PREMIERE



In Casablanca The Angels Don't Fly

Friday, October 15th at 9:30 pm

Sunday, October 17th at 6:30 pm

The only phone in a snowy Berber mountain village is a cellular phone high on a hilltop. Pregnant Aicha cannot make it up the hill in order to talk to her husband, Said, in Casablanca. Instead she seeks the assistance of a local schoolteacher who writes to Said that she will never come to Casablanca, the city that has "devoured" him. Meanwhile, in Casablanca, Said works for a pittance at a café for a wily boss. Working with Said is Ismail, a tray jockey who races around the neighborhood every day delivering glasses of tea and who has fallen in love with a pair of shoes in a shop window that costs a price way beyond his means. Ottman, another young man from Said's village, is faced with the decision to sell his prized Arab stallion in order to repay debts. Beautifully filmed with considerable skill, imagination and tight script and bouncy Moroccan pop tunes ring true throughout.

—*Variety*

(Morocco, Directed by Mohamed Asli, 2004, 97 minutes)



About Baghdad

★ *In Person: Directors Sinan Antoon, Bassam Haddad, Maya Mikdashi, Suzy Salamy, Adam Shapiro*

Saturday, October 16th at 6:30 pm
Sunday, October 17th at 9:00 pm

This compelling documentary, made after the fall of the Ba'th regime in Iraq, provides us with a unique insight on what Iraqis think and feel about the post-war situation and the complex relationship between the US and Iraq. The film follows Sinan Antoon, an Iraqi poet, who returns to his native Baghdad after twelve years of exile in the United States. From poets to politicians, cabbies to communists, Antoon speaks to Iraqis of various backgrounds and orientations who describe the complexity, beauty and suffering of living under decades of wars, sanctions and now occupation. The directors of *About Baghdad* make up InCounter Productions, a collective of independent activists and artists who seek to present audiences with their first opportunity to hear unadulterated Iraqi voices.

(USA, Directed by Sinan Antoon, Bassam Haddad, Maya Mikdashi, Suzy Salamy, Adam Shapiro, 2004, 90 minutes, Beta SP)

We Loved Each Other So Much

Saturday, October 16th at 7:00 pm
Sunday, October 17th at 8:30 pm

What used to be a thriving port city where religions and ethnicities could convene in peace, Beirut has become a land torn apart by factions. Dutch director Jack Janssen's rich tapestry weaves together several Beirut neighborhoods that have survived their country's recent troubled past. Though different in their experiences, one powerful common thread ties them together: the enchanting, mystical voice of Fairuz. The most famous singer, and arguably the most popular cultural icon of the Arab world, Fairuz is looked upon as a symbol of unity, hope and beauty. Her songs greet Beirut first thing in the morning on the radio, her voice wafting through prison bars, restaurants, car windows on busy streets and in the dorm rooms of young college students. Stunning images of modern Beirut provide the backdrop for her simultaneously mournful and spirited melodies. In this unforgettable documentary, we come to understand that people once torn apart by differences can be held together by a single, undivided passion.

— *San Francisco International Film Festival*

(The Netherlands, Directed by Jack Janssen, 2003, 80 minutes, Beta SP)



AMERICAN PREMIERE



Our Listeners' Request

Saturday, October 16th at 9:15 pm
 Sunday, October 24th at 6:30 pm

A crowd pleaser from one of Syria's best known filmmakers, *Our Listeners' Request* offers a nostalgic look at life in a Syrian village at a time when radio was king and tension was high on the Syrian border: Every week, villagers young and old gather at the house of Abu Jamal, a kindly village elder who happens to own the only radio in town, to listen to the popular music program, *Our Listeners' Request*, eagerly hoping that their song request will be selected. Saleh is among the most avid listeners and unfailingly visits Abu Jamal every week to listen to the show because his love, Wathifeh, promises to marry him once her request (Samira Tawfiq's "I Feel My Heart Beating, Beating") is played on the air. Meanwhile, another young couple in love, Azizeh and Jamal, use the opportunity of the radio show to meet and surreptitiously send messages to each other. Winner of the Special Jury Prize at the Damascus Film Festival.

(Syria, Directed by Abdullatif Abdulhamid, 2003, 89 minutes)

Shown with:



Distance from the Sun

Naim, a Middle Eastern immigrant chef, struggles to find his way of life in small town America. This

talented cook is challenged to balance old traditions with the customs of his new home.

(USA, Directed by Eyad Zahra, 2004, 8 minutes)

AMERICAN PREMIERE



La Villa

Sunday, October 17th at 6:00 pm
 Friday, October 22nd at 9:00 pm

It's summer in Tunis in the 1980's and economic times could be better: Hedi, a young man of 22, has just failed his baccalaureate exams for the third time. Meanwhile his father, Moncef, has accepted an offer from his boss to move in and keep an eye on his house while he vacations in Nice. Moncef's family begrudgingly leave their modest house to settle down in the outbuilding of the boss' luxurious villa. Moncef's one rule is firm — never enter the boss' main house. Gradually, Hedi begins peeking over the neighbor's wall and admires the swimming pool, beautiful grounds and Ramla, the girl who lives next door. He is lured by their lifestyle and is curious to explore the boss' villa.

(Tunisia, Directed by Mohamed Damak, 2003, 90 minutes)

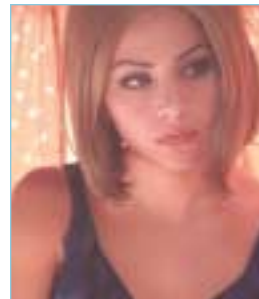
Shown with:

AMERICAN PREMIERE

Van Express

Iyad and Tarek, both from humble origins, own an old VW van and try to find moneymaking opportunities using the van against the backdrop of an economy in shambles in contemporary Lebanon.

(Lebanon, Directed by Elie Khalifé, 2004, 21 minutes)



EAST COAST PREMIERE

The Olive Harvest

★ *In Person: Director Hanna Elias*



**Friday, October
22nd at 6:45 pm
Sunday, October
24th at 8:45 pm**

Winner of the Special Jury Prize and Best Arab Film at the Cairo Film Festival, and Second Prize at the San Francisco Film Festival. *The Olive Harvest* is the story of two Palestinian brothers who love the same woman. Amidst the backdrop of the captivating landscapes in Palestine, *The Olive Harvest* is more than a mere love story. It also explores tradition and family loyalty set in the larger context of unease in a Palestinian countryside vulnerable to encroaching Israeli settlements. Upon his release from an Israeli prison, older brother Mazen develops romantic feelings for the beautiful Raeda. However, Raeda is already engaged to Mazen's younger brother Taher; their love kept a secret because of the tradition for the eldest brother to wed first. Unsure of her true feelings, Raeda is forced into making a decision by the feuding brothers and by her authoritative father.

(Palestine, Directed by Hanna Elias, 2003, 89 minutes)

The Door to the Sun

★ *In Person: Director Yousry Nasrallah*

Saturday, October 23rd at 5:00 pm

This epic four-and-a-half-hour film was unquestionably the hot ticket for Arab film critics at this year's Cannes Film Festival. *The Door to the Sun* is the story of a Palestinian man, beginning in Galilee in the 1940's through to life in a refugee camp in Lebanon in the 1990's, all told through the eyes of



Younes, a young villager turned freedom fighter. Years later, the elderly Younes is rushed to a hospital where friend and neighbor, Dr. Khalil, watches over and cares for him. The story unfolds in flashbacks as Khalil recalls

Younes' own past. He tells the story of Younes' love Nahila where, at the end of the British Mandate and at the start of first Palestine war, the young newlyweds secretly met in a Galilee cave that Younes christened the Door to the Sun.

(Egypt, Directed by Yousry Nasrallah, 2004, 278 minutes)

Zaman, the Man from the Reeds

★ *In Person: Director Amer Alwan*

Saturday, October 23rd at 6:30 pm

Sunday, October 24th at 8:30 pm

The first feature film from Iraq in fifteen years, *Zaman, The Man from the Reeds* was shot under difficult circumstances in January 2003, just before the war began. In this quiet, lyrical picture overlaid with a touch of poetry, the aging Zaman seeks to find the medicine that could save his beloved wife. From this ancient world of reeds and waterfowl, Zaman journeys to urban modernity. Director Alwan effectively mixes lyricism with documentary-style realism, capturing the final days of life under Saddam Hussein, whose regime confiscated five reels of this film that are now lost forever. — *Variety*

(Iraq, Directed by Amer Alwan, 2003, 88 minutes)



AMERICAN PREMIERE

Women Beyond Borders

★ *In Person: Director Jean Chamoun*

Saturday, October 23rd at 9:00 pm

Sunday, October 24th at 6:00 pm

Three exceptional women, renowned Palestinian poet Fadwa Toukan, charismatic



pioneer Sameeha Khalil, and ex-political prisoner Kifah Afifi all have broken boundaries — literal and metaphorical.

Director Jean

Chamoun reveals a touching portrayal of Kifah Afifi's experiences in the notorious Khiam Detention Center in south Lebanon. He weaves together a tapestry of how her personal experiences intersect with those of the two women she admires most — Toukan and Khalil. Fadwa Toukan's home became her prison when her family removed her from school at the age of 12 after a boy gave her a flower. Sameeha Khalil, a famous Arab woman activist, was instrumental in creating several Palestinian women's associations. In this award winning film, Kifah recounts her experience in Khiam as well as the powerful bonds of friendship forged with her fellow inmates behind bars.

(Lebanon, Directed by Jean K. Chamoun, 2004, 60 minutes, Beta SP)

Shown with:

Lili

Inspired by a novel by Youssef Idriss, this is the story of a young cleric sent to a corrupted area of Cairo in order to introduce some moral standards. But his main struggle will become his own fancy for the attractive local beauty, Lili. Stars Egyptian heartthrob Amr Waked.

(Egypt, Directed by Marwan Hamed, 2001, 40 minutes)

Film Schedule

Friday, October 15

6:30 pm **Sleepless Nights**
9:30 pm **In Casablanca The Angels Don't Fly**

Saturday, October 16

6:30 pm **About Baghdad**
7:00 pm **We Loved Each Other So Much**
9:00 pm **Sleepless Nights**
9:15 pm **Our Listeners' Request** *shown with Distance from the Sun*

Sunday, October 17

6:00 pm **La Villa** *shown with Van Express*
6:30 pm **In Casablanca The Angels Don't Fly**
8:30 pm **We Loved Each Other So Much**
9:00 pm **About Baghdad**

Friday, October 22

6:45 pm **The Olive Harvest**
9:00 pm **La Villa** *shown with Van Express*

Saturday, October 23

5:00 pm **The Door to the Sun**
6:30 pm **Zaman, the Man from the Reeds**
9:00 pm **Women Beyond Borders** *shown with Lili*

Sunday, October 24

6:00 pm **Women Beyond Borders** *shown with Lili*
6:30 pm **Our Listeners' Request** *shown with Distance from the Sun*
8:30 pm **Zaman, the Man from the Reeds**
8:45 pm **The Olive Harvest**

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The Washington, DC International
Film Festival

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