



# Arabian Sights Film Festival 2009

Contemporary Arab Cinema

October 9 – 18

[filmfestdc.org](http://filmfestdc.org)

# Arabian Sights

October 9 – 18

presented by

## The Washington, DC International Film Festival

The Fourteenth Annual *Arabian Sights* Film Festival offers a dynamic and diverse range of new films from Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Morocco, Yemen, Syria and more. Select directors will be present at their screenings to discuss their work. An Audience Award for favorite film will be presented. All films will be screened with English subtitles. Please visit [www.filmfestdc.org](http://www.filmfestdc.org) for updates on films and guests.

### *Admission*

Tickets may be purchased at [www.filmfestdc.org](http://www.filmfestdc.org) and at the theater starting one hour before the first show. Cash or check sales only at the theater: \$10.00 per person for each screening, unless otherwise noted.

### *Festival Pass*

A special package of 10 tickets is available online and at the theater for a discounted price of \$85.00. (This package does not include the October 17 screening of *Masquerades* with reception).

### *Locations*

#### **Landmark's E Street Cinema**

555 11th Street, NW

Take Metro Red, Orange or Blue line to Metro Center. Theater entrance on E Street between 10th and 11th Streets, NW. Three hours reduced rate parking available in adjacent garage with validation.

#### **National Geographic Society**

1600 M Street, NW, Grosvenor Auditorium

Take Metro Red line to Farragut North, exit toward L Street. Free parking available in the National Geographic Society garage.

# Festival Schedule

## Friday, October 9

- 6:30 pm *The Losing Bet*  
7:00 pm *A Fiancé for Yasmina*  
9:00 pm *Hassan & Morcos*  
9:00 pm *Open Shutters Iraq*

**Landmark's E Street Cinema**

## Saturday, October 10

- 7:00 pm *A Fiancé for Yasmina*  
7:00 pm *Française*  
9:00 pm *Open Shutters Iraq*  
9:00 pm *Welcome*

**Landmark's E Street Cinema**

## Sunday, October 11

- 2:30 pm *Hassan & Morcos*  
2:30 pm *The Losing Bet*  
5:00 pm *Laila's Birthday*  
5:00 pm *Welcome*  
6:45 pm *Française*  
7:15 pm *Number One*

**Landmark's E Street Cinema**

## Thursday, October 15

- 6:30 pm *Fawzeya's Secret Recipe*  
6:30 pm *Laila's Birthday*  
8:30 pm *A Road to Mecca*  
9:00 pm *The Long Night*

**Landmark's E Street Cinema**

## Friday, October 16

- 7:00 pm *Masquerades*  
9:00 pm *Fawzeya's Secret Recipe*

**National Geographic Society**

## Saturday, October 17

- 7:00 pm *Masquerades*  
*Followed by reception*

- 9:00 pm *London River*

**National Geographic Society**

## Sunday, October 18

- 5:00 pm *London River*  
7:00 pm *Number One*

**National Geographic Society**

**For More Information**

**filmfestdc.org**

**202-234-FILM**

**Contemporary Arab Cinema**

# Fawzeya's Secret Recipe

*In Person: Director Magdi Ahmed Ali*

Thursday, October 15 at 6:30 pm, Landmark's E Street Cinema

Friday, October 16 at 9:00 pm, National Geographic Society



Leading Egyptian filmmaker, Magdi Ahmed Ali, is known for his films featuring strong female leads and tackling pro-feminist topics, such as the very popular *Life...My Passion*, and the controversial *Girl's Secrets*. In his latest film, the lead character, Fawzeya, is a woman who has been married four times and bore children in each of the marriages. Yet even in the face of poverty, she not only maintains her independence, but enjoys a friendly

relationship with all her ex-husbands, gathering them together for dinner every week to serve her secret recipe – her love of life. *Fawzeya's Secret Recipe* is an extraordinary film that charts new horizons in Arab cinema. Brilliant acting abounds from Ilham Shaheen (winner, Best Actress at Abu Dhabi Film Festival), Aida Abdel-Aziz, and veteran belly-dancer Nagwa Fouad in a surprising unprecedented role. (Egypt, Directed by Magdi Ahmed Ali, 2008, 110 min., 35mm)

# A Fiancé for Yasmina

Friday, October 9 at 7:00 pm, Landmark's E Street Cinema

Saturday, October 10 at 7:00 pm, Landmark's E Street Cinema



Malaga Spanish Film Festival's audience favorite and winner for Best Film and Best Actress (Sanaa Alaoui), *A Fiancé for Yasmina* is a humorously romantic summer's tale about marriages of convenience, social commitment and the struggle to get by. Love, marriage, and immigration beautifully intertwine and playfully clash in Irene Cardona's tale of a young woman's search for a husband and citizenship,

and her effect on a small Moroccan neighborhood in Spain. Yasmina is in a rush to marry Javi, a policeman who prefers to take his time. Alfredo is against marriage altogether, but is prepared to marry for friendship...or for cash. All the while, Yasmina's co-worker Lola suspects her husband, Jorge, has fallen for the enchanting and driven young woman.

(Morocco/Spain, Directed by Irene Cardona, 2008, 92 min., 35mm)

## Française

Saturday, October 10 at 7:00 pm  
Landmark's E Street Cinema

Sunday, October 11 at 6:45 pm  
Landmark's E Street Cinema

Winner of multiple awards at the Rotterdam and the Dubai International Film Festivals. Precocious and sassy tomboy Sofia (César Award-winner Hafsia Herzi), born in France from North African parents, lives a happy childhood in a French suburban city. When her father makes a snap decision to return to his native Morocco, Sofia suddenly finds herself in an unfamiliar country at the cusp of her adolescence. Eight years later, Sofia retains her independence and strong-will while she divides her time between the university dorm and her family's olive farm. Sofia's resolve to return to France persists while she keeps her adoring boyfriend at bay and pleads with her reluctant father to relinquish her passport so that she can return to the country she loves best. Director Souad El-Bouhati explores issues of identity, origin and family with a deft touch in this finely observed and poignant debut feature.

*(Morocco/France, Directed by Souad El Bouhati, 2008, 84 min., Digital)*



## Hassan & Morkos

Friday, October 9 at 9:00 pm  
Landmark's E Street Cinema

Sunday, October 11 at 2:30 pm  
Landmark's E Street Cinema

Starring Omar Sharif and noted comedian Adel Imam, this comedy about compassion makes serious statements about religious tolerance between Christians and Muslims in modern Egypt. When a Christian theologian (Imam) falls afoul of violent extremists, the government places him and his family into a sort of witness protection program. To better conceal their identities, they are issued Muslim names and IDs and placed with a Muslim family. The new identities cause more confusion, however, as the theologian is mistaken for a notorious Muslim scholar and possible Al-Qaeda operative, "Sheik Hassan." Soon, the family must flee to a cousin's apartment building in the south. In a culture where names can reveal religion, problems persist—especially after the son, Guergues, falls for the daughter of next-door-neighbor Morkos (Sharif), who is himself hiding secrets.—*Dave Nuttycombe*

*(Egypt, Directed by Rami Imam, 2008, 110 min., 35mm)*





## Laila's Birthday

Sunday, October 11 at 5:00 pm  
Landmark's E Street Cinema

Thursday, October 15 at 6:30 pm  
Landmark's E Street Cinema

In this wry comedy, everyday life in an occupied territory is never easy, but who knew it could be so beautifully absurd? On the morning of his daughter's seventh birthday, Abu Laila (Mohamed Bakri) has promised his wife (Areen Omari) that he will bring home a birthday cake for the celebration. But first he must make it through the day. Former judge Abu Laila drives a cab to stay employed and make ends meet. He is adamant that passengers fasten their seat belts. He insists on no smoking. He refuses passengers who jump into his cab with AK-47s slung over their shoulders. Abu Laila must endure armed clients, bomb scares and raging arguments about occupation, but mainly he just wants everyone to behave. Director Masharawi deftly weaves reality and imagination into a scenario that is a pleasure to watch.

(Palestine/Tunisia/The Netherlands, Directed by Rashid Masharawi, 2008, 72 min., Digital)



## London River

Saturday, October 17 at 9:00 pm  
National Geographic Society

Sunday, October 18 at 5:00 pm  
National Geographic Society

Winner of an Independent Jury prize at this year's Berlin Film Festival, *London River* follows Elisabeth Sommers (Award-winning actress, Brenda Blethyn), a farming woman with a simple rural routine. When her regular calls to her city-dwelling daughter go unanswered, she travels to north London where she is caught in the hustle and bustle of the city, just after the July 2005 bombings. As she continues to search fruitlessly for her daughter, the unfamiliarity of her daughter's predominately Muslim neighborhood begins to unsettle her, and fear sets in. At the same time, Ousmane (Sotigui Kouyaté) has traveled from rural France to London to search for his son, also missing since the attacks. Ousmane and Elisabeth meet by chance, but it soon dawns on them that his son and her daughter were roommates, maybe more. Blethyn gives her best performance in years and the great Malian actor Kouyaté, who won Best Actor at the Berlin Film Festival, contrasts her quivering concern with grave calm. Rachid Bouchareb, the Franco-Algerian director of *Days of Glory*, directs this intimate story with tenderness and surprising hope. *London River* is a film where the everyday collisions of cultures produce not only conflict, but also possibility.- *Toronto International Film Festival* (Algeria/France/UK, Directed by Rachid Bouchareb, 2009, 90 min., 35mm)

# The Long Night

Thursday, October 15 at 9:00 pm  
Landmark's E Street Cinema

Winner of the Golden Tauro for Best Film at the Taormina Film Festival, this meticulously paced political drama explores personal and social exile when three of four political prisoners are released after a twenty year "long night" of incarceration. As families gather to welcome home their patriarchs, tensions rise and the balance between family and country, between the personal and the political, is threatened. How do you re-enter a world that has carried on without you? How do you cope with the imprisonment of a loved one and with his unexpected return? And what of the one who is left behind? With an astounding ensemble cast, *The Long Night* is a powerfully brave meditation on the aftermath of political turmoil and the hurdles we leap to regain a sense of stability.  
(Syria, Directed by Hatem Ali, 2009, 94 min., 35mm)



# The Losing Bet

Friday, October 9 at 6:30 pm  
Landmark's E Street Cinema

Sunday, October 11 at 2:30 pm  
Landmark's E Street Cinema

Yemen's first locally produced film, *The Losing Bet* features an intriguing and compelling plot. Shaima and Najat, two smart and educated young Yemeni women with an artistic flair, befriend a Western girl. Tawfiq, a repentant extremist, returns home to reunite with his wife and son, whom he abandoned years ago. Mabruk, a lazy unemployed youth, is recruited by a militant group and ends up on a disastrous course. The film seriously depicts the radicalization process through a dialogue between recruiters, young people turning away from militancy, and those who have rejected violence. *The Losing Bet* pokes fun at self-righteous militants. With the intention of educating young Yemenis, this film follows the paths of both extremists and the families they leave behind in this exploration of the price of terrorism.  
(Yemen, Directed by Dr. Fahdel Al Olofi, 2009, 105 min., Digital)



# Masquerades

Friday, October 16 at 7:00 pm, National Geographic Society, \$10.00

Saturday, October 17 at 7:00 pm, National Geographic Society

*October 17 screening immediately followed by a reception at the National Geographic Society. Film and Reception, \$15.00.*



Winner for Best Film at the Dubai International Film Festival and Algeria's submission for the 2009 Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film. In this quirky yet socially conscious film by writer/director/and star, Lyes Salem, Mounir lives with his family in a small village in the heart of the Algerian Aures. Overly self-obsessed and arrogant, and generally ignored by everyone, he is determined to earn the respect of his fellow villagers. But he has one problem. His narcoleptic sister, Rym (Sarah Reguieg), falls asleep anywhere and everywhere on a whim. One drunken night, Mounir fabricates a story that a rich foreign businessman has proposed to his sister. Immediately, everyone is anxious to greet him and to be his

friend. The village begins preparing for this wedding with no bridegroom in sight. Unbeknownst to him, Mounir has changed the course of his sister's future. (Algeria/France, Directed by Lyes Salem, 2008, 92 min., 35mm)



*Co-presented with the Embassy of Algeria*

*This film is presented by the Global Film Initiative and is part of the Global Lens film series.*



## Number One

Sunday, October 11 at 7:15 pm  
Landmark's E Street Cinema

Sunday, October 18 at 7:00 pm  
National Geographic Society

In this Moroccan comedy hit, *Number One* tackles gender, class and power with humor and a feast of laughs. Aziz, a macho boss of a clothing factory terrorizes his employees, family and most people he encounters. But when he shows a kinder and courteous demeanor when dealing with a European buyer; his wife, Soraya, has had enough and secretly sneaks a magical potion in Aziz's dinner. The next morning Aziz wakes up a changed man, sympathetic towards everyone from his employees to his long-suffering wife. Aziz thinks he is going mad. He seeks medical help and looks to other men to figure out what is ailing him. Unable to revert to his old self, he embraces his new personality. He cooks, he cleans, he does the laundry. *Number One* reflects on the reforms occurring in Morocco's family law and challenges traditional gender roles in a light-hearted and endearing manner.

(Morocco, Directed by Zakia Tahiri, 2009, 86 min., 35mm)



## Open Shutters Iraq

*In Person: Director Maysoun Pachachi*

Friday, October 9 at 9:00 pm  
Landmark's E Street Cinema

Saturday, October 10 at 9:00 pm  
Landmark's E Street Cinema

*Open Shutters Iraq* documents a remarkable photography project; a group of women from five cities in Iraq live and work together in the Syrian capital, Damascus. There they learn to take photographs, and at the same time, present their lives to each other. With humor and defiance, the women unearth memories and tell stories, which have remained buried for 30 years in the course of surviving devastating years of war, dictatorship and sanctions. Upon their return to Iraq, they shoot hundreds of photographs, each imbued with the sharp emotional truth of lived experience. As one woman says, 'It is our feelings taking the pictures, not us.' In Iraq a sense of hope is not easy, but this intimate, moving film is ultimately hopeful. It shows how people traumatized and silenced by the 'un-making' of their world, can re-assert a sense of existence with an act of creative articulation.

(Iraq, Directed by Maysoun Pachachi, 2008, 102 min., Digital)



# A Road to Mecca: The Journey of Muhammad Asad



**Thursday, October 15 at 8:30 pm**  
**Landmark's E Street Cinema**

In the 1920s Leopold Weiss, a Viennese Jew, visited the Middle East, studied the Koran, and converted to Islam in search of an inner peace, changing his name to Muhammad Asad. He is credited as one of the leading scholars of

Islam in the 20th century. Asad played a key role in the founding of Pakistan and later served as Pakistan's U.N. Ambassador. *A Road to Mecca* is an enlightening and engaging documentary that traces Asad's spiritual journey from the Arabian deserts to the United States and his legacy as a modern thinker. With an astute blend of archival footage and excerpts from the numerous books and newspaper articles to his name, and with contemporary interviews of scholars, friends, and critics, the film portrays the lifelong evolution of Muhammad Asad, who sought to be a mediator between East and West. This unique portrait of contemporary Islam challenges deeply rooted Western prejudices by revealing the core beliefs of a profoundly humane religion.

*(Austria, Directed by Georg Misch, 2009, 92 min., Digital)*

## Welcome

**Saturday, October 10 at 9:00 pm**  
**Landmark's E Street Cinema**

**Sunday, October 11 at 5:00 pm**  
**Landmark's E Street Cinema**

In this Berlin Film Festival Panorama winner, *Bilal*, a 17-year old Kurdish boy, travels through the Middle East and Europe to join his girlfriend who has recently immigrated to England. His journey comes to an abrupt end when he is stopped on the French side of the English Channel. Determined to swim across the Channel, Bilal goes to the local swimming pool to train. There he meets Simon, a swimming instructor in the midst of a divorce. To impress his wife and win back her heart, Simon decides to risk everything by taking Bilal under his wing. Starring internationally acclaimed French actor Vincent Lindon and exciting newcomer Firat Ayverdi, *Welcome* is a stunningly honest and touching portrayal about intersecting lives, unlikely friendships, and the hope of new beginnings.

*(France, Directed by Philippe Lioret, 2009, 110 min., 35mm)*



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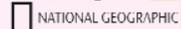


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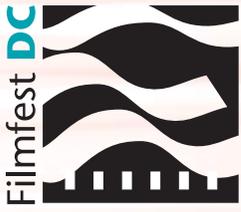
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**Shirin Ghareeb**, Arabian Sights Festival Director and Programmer and Deputy Director of the Washington, DC International Film Festival.

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