



Arabian Sights Film Festival Returns April 21 – May 1

For Immediate Release

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(April 1, 2022) – Washington, DC – From April 21 through May 1, 2022, the Arabian Sights Film Festival will return for its 27th season with new films from and about the Arab world. Arabian Sights Film welcomes viewers with in-person screenings at Landmark's E Street Cinema in addition to online streaming. Arabian Sights will be presented in conjunction with Filmfest DC, its umbrella organization.

These films fulfill the Arabian Sights mission of bringing 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:

Mona Akl's *Costa Brava, Lebanon*, starring Nadine Labaki and Saleh Bakri, tells the tale of the Badri family's flight from Beirut's garbage to a mountainous pristine area only to find that governmental corruption brought a landfill next to their fence.

East Coast premiere of Nabil Ayouch's drama *Casablanca Beats* is a high-spirited street music-infused film that takes place in an arts center where a motley group of young people bond, bicker and hone their amazing talents through the medium of hip-hop.

Peace by Chocolate is a feature-length film based on the true story of a Syrian refugee family who restart their chocolate business with the help of their new community in Nova Scotia. Canadian director Jonathan Keijser will be present for the screenings along with the real-life protagonist that this story is based on.

In *You Resemble Me*, journalist-turned-director Dina Amer explores the emotional history of Hasna, a French Moroccan girl suspected of the 2015 suicide bombing in Paris. This deeply compelling narrative is co-executive produced by Spike Lee and Spike Jonze.

The North American premiere of the talented Mai Masri's new documentary *Beirut: Eye of the Storm* focuses on the massive 2019 anti-corruption demonstrations in Beirut which were impacted by COVID and met by tear gas

and gunfire.

Amr Diab's controversial film *Amira* tells the story of a daughter conceived by the sperm of her Palestinian freedom fighter father, which was smuggled out of an Israeli jail. Events unfold that make Amira question who she is and where she belongs.

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

Tickets go on sale beginning April 1. The full catalog of films will be available on April 1 online and in a full page spread in *The Washington Post* on Friday, April 15.

For more information and updates please visit: filmfestdc.org

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THE 27th ANNUAL ARABIAN SIGHTS FILM FESTIVAL

THE FOLLOWING ARABIAN SIGHTS FILMS WILL BE FEATURED:

AMIRA

Mohamed Diab

Egypt/Jordan, 2021, 98 minutes

Palestinian teenager Amira (Tara Abboud) has only known her freedom-fighter father, Nawar (a gentle performance by Ali Suleiman), in snatched minutes together separated by glass; it's an open secret that she was conceived with sperm smuggled out of the Israeli prison where he is held. Being a "daughter of a hero" is a big part of her identity, but events unfold that reveal the vast difference between paternity and patriarchy.

In Arabic and Hebrew with English subtitles

NORTH AMERICAN PREMIERE

BEIRUT: EYE OF THE STORM

Mai Masri

Lebanon/France, 2021, 75 minutes

What if they gave a revolution and Covid came? Not long after the massive October 2019 demonstrations in Beirut aimed at toppling Lebanon's chronically corrupt government, the streets that had exploded with chanting and hope (followed by tear gas and gunfire) were eerily quiet. The pandemic had forced optimism into lockdown, and the country's economy was in freefall. Four female journalist-artists reflect on this whiplash effect in Mai Masri's creative, captivating documentary.

In Arabic with English subtitles

EAST COAST PREMIERE

CASABLANCA BEATS

Nabil Ayouch

Morocco/France, 2021, 101 minutes

Rapper-turned-teacher Anas Basbousi arrives in Sidi Moumen—Casablanca's Bronx—to teach hip-hop to scrappy or shy, opinionated or open youths who have all written their earnest raps before class even starts. Anas claims that rap is born of humiliation, and his students and their lyrics will go through some changes before this high-spirited, street-music-infused film is over. The young nonprofessional actors playing fictionalized versions of themselves hone their considerable talents before our eyes.

In Arabic with English subtitles

COSTA BRAVA, LEBANON

Mounia Akl

Lebanon, 2021, 106 minutes

The Badri family escapes Beirut's physical and mental toxins by living off the grid far above the city. But their idyll is broken when a landfill is built right outside their fence, bringing the "garbage" of government corruption to their door. In this spirited film, *Variety* noted "Akl's perceptive writing of this family as a collection of singular individuals who just so happen to be related to one another."

In Arabic with English subtitles

PEACE BY CHOCOLATE

Jonathan Keijser

Canada, 2021, 96 minutes

After fleeing Damascus when the family's thriving chocolate factory is bombed, Tareq Hadhad and his family immigrate to the small town of Antigonish in Canada. Tareq's father Issam (Hatem Ali) starts making chocolates again that are a hit at the local church. Neighbor Frank (Mark Camacho) rounds up local investors for a new factory. While Issam's "Peace By Chocolate" business continues to grow, his son Tareq is torn between his dream of becoming a doctor and his obligation to the family business.

In Arabic and English with English subtitles

YOU RESEMBLE ME

Dina Amer

France, 2021, 90 minutes

Journalist-turned-director Dina Amer, convinced that suspected suicide bomber Hasna Ait Boulahcen had to be more than a footnote to the Paris attacks of 2015, explores the emotional history of the Moroccan-French girl in this deeply compelling narrative executive produced by Spike Lee and Spike Jonze. From a child of the Paris streets to a street-smart young woman, Hasna is ever in search of family, a quest for identity and belonging that proves disastrous.

In French and Arabic with English subtitles

OF RELATED INTEREST:

ARTHUR RAMBO

Laurent Cantet

France, 2021, 86 minutes

Celebrated author Karim D (Rabah Nait Oufella) is enjoying the attention and success that comes with his new book. But when Karim's teenage online identity as Arthur Rambo is revealed, the two worlds collide. Where Karim is now a nuanced author, "Arthur Rambo" was profane and blindly provocative, tweeting out broadsides that included homophobic and antisemitic "jokes" to get a rise out of bourgeois France. He soon learns that the internet is forever.

In French with English subtitles

BARAKAT

Amy Jephta

South Africa, 2020, 103 minutes

Right before the Muslim holiday of *Eid*, widow Aisha Davids expresses her happiness to her four grown sons about her relationship with a kind doctor who has just proposed.

THEY are not so happy. This very amusing and heartwarming film is set in a middle class Coloured suburb of Cape Town. *Barakat*, an Arabic word meaning blessings, is a story about celebrating life, culture, and the importance of family. It's the first feature film in the regional/cultural dialect of Afrikaaps and is South Africa's entry to the Academy Awards.

In English and Afrikaaps with English subtitles

BOYCOTT

Julia Bacha

USA, 2021, 70 minutes

Consumer boycotts have been protected speech for a long time in the U.S. However, recent laws in 33 states would force individuals and companies to pledge not to engage in the Israeli boycott movement known as BDS in order to take home paychecks or receive investments. Would a tomato farmer and publisher in Arkansas, a speech therapist in Austin, and an attorney in Arizona even have occasion to boycott Israel? Not the point: all three have challenged these laws on First Amendment principles. *Boycott* has been called "a

legal thriller with ‘accidental plaintiffs’ at the center of the story.” *Presented in the Justice Matters section of Filmfest DC.*

US PREMIERE

KUNG FU ZOHRA

Mabrouk El Mechri

France, 2021, 100 minutes

Convinced that a divorce would separate her from her little girl, Zohra (Sabrina Ouazani) cannot bring herself to leave her husband Omar (Ramzy Bédia) despite his violent behavior. But all that changes when she meets Chang Sue, a security guard at the gym where she works to make ends meet. Zohra does not know it yet, but Chang Sue is a Master of Kung-Fu...and ready to teach her the basics.

In French with English subtitles

NORTH AMERICAN PREMIERE

RABIYE KURNAZ VS. GEORGE W. BUSH

Andreas Dresen

Germany, 2022, 119 minutes

Andreas Dresen’s film takes a quixotic approach to a dire true-life story of middle-class Turkish-German housewife Rabiye (played by German comedian Meltem Kaptan) and her battle to get her luckless son Murat released from Guantánamo. Her at first reluctant pro-bono lawyer (Alexander Scheer) eventually takes the case—all the way to the US Supreme Court. The real Murat spent many years at Gitmo, a stark reminder of the post-9/11 era’s judicial abuses. *Presented in the Justice Matters section of Filmfest DC.*

In German and Turkish with English subtitles

Warsha (Short film)

Dania Bdeir

Lebanon/France, 2021, 16 mins, narrative

Mohammad, a lonely construction worker in Beirut, finds solace in a most unusual place — the cabin of the tallest and notoriously most dangerous crane in Lebanon.

In Arabic with English subtitles