

SAFAR

A JOURNEY THROUGH
POPULAR ARAB CINEMA

21-27 SEPTEMBER 2012 AT THE ICA, LONDON



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المركز
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The Arab
British
Centre

The Arab British Centre, working in partnership with the ICA and Dubai International Film Festival, is delighted to present **Safar: A Journey Through Popular Arab Cinema**, the most ambitious season of popular Arab film ever seen in the UK.

This week-long series of classic and contemporary popular cinema takes audiences on a journey of gripping dramas, subversive comedies and exaggerated melodramas, taking in an array of rarely seen and re-mastered cinematic masterpieces as well as recent releases, many never before seen on British screens.

The programme explores a fifty-year period of filmmaking that demonstrates the diversity and complexity of Arab cinema. Focusing on Egyptian cultural production (as the historical epicentre of Arab cinema), the programme also includes recent popular hits from Lebanon and Jordan.

The series avoids presenting cultural stereotypes without shying away from controversy. Instead, **Safar: A Journey Through Popular Arab Cinema** invites audiences to experience local popular culture and debate film's effectiveness in conveying social histories.

With so many Arab countries in the midst of restructuring themselves both politically and socially, it seems more urgent than ever to give these films a platform in the UK. Including literary adaptations such as *The Yacoubian Building* and box office smash-hits such as *Bosta*, as well as films starring cinematic icons such as Adel Imam, a pre-Lawrence of Arabia Omar Sharif, and contemporary stars Nadine Labaki and Khaled Abol Naga, **Safar: A Journey Through Popular Arab Cinema** offers a rich programme that is accessible to both mainstream British audiences and fans of World Cinema alike.

The Arab British Centre, London
arabbritishcentre.org.uk



OMAR KHOLEIF

CURATOR'S INTRODUCTION

Welcome to **Safar: A Journey Through Popular Arab Cinema** at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London. When The Arab British Centre and I first started working on the theme for the festival, our goals were always ambitious. Our starting point was to show audiences living in the UK something that they had never seen before on the big screen, and to invigorate debates about the richness of Arab cinema as an integral part of World Cinema's history. Over the past eight years, however, my research has revealed that more often than not, the Arab cinema that we receive here in the UK does not reflect the authenticity of local audience tastes in Arabic-speaking countries.

With our festival, we have set out on a journey to change this, and to write popular Arab cinema into British culture. With **Safar**, we come together to celebrate its icons — whether they be actors such as Soad Hosni and Adel Imam, writers like Naguib Mahfouz, or legendary filmmakers such as Youssef

Chahine. In this respect, all of the films you will find here are all locally 'popular' in the Arab region in some way, and are what some may even call *sha'abi* (a unique word in Arabic that encompasses folklore, street culture, and lo-brow popular tradition).

Each film was carefully chosen on the basis of its relationship to Arab popular culture, taking into account box office sales, the cultural significance of its stars and producers, as well as its local critical acclaim. Spanning a period that stretches over fifty years of history, the films thematically span melodrama, comedy, romance and lacerating political critique. Collectively, our programme reveals cinema's potential to unify Arab audiences the world over, and serves as our invitation for you, the British public, to take part in and connect with its diverse history.

Omar Kholeif - Curator
everythingok.co.uk



FILM SCHEDULE

BOSTA (2005)
21 September at 20:30

WATCH OUT FOR ZOOUZOU (1971)
22 September at 18:15

STRAY BULLET (2009)
22 September at 20:50

THE BEGINNING AND THE END (1960)
23 September at 15:30

ALEXANDRIA, WHY? (1978)
23 September at 18:00

CAPTAIN ABU RAED (2007)
25 September at 19:00

TERRORISM AND THE KEBAB (1993)
26 September at 18:30

ONE-ZERO (2009)
26 September at 20:30

THE YACCOUBIAN BUILDING (2006)
27 September at 18:30

MALU HALASA

WRITER-IN-RESIDENCE

We are delighted that London-based journalist, writer and editor, Malu Halasa will serve as writer-in-residence for **Safar: A Journey Through Popular Arab Cinema**. Malu will be blogging daily at arabbritishcentre.org.uk and ica.org.uk. Malu is a leading expert in her field, having edited books such as *Kaveh Golestan: Recording the Truth in Iran* (2007) and *The Secret Life of Syrian Lingerie* (2008). She is also Series Editor of *Transit*, an occasional book series showcasing new writing and images from the Middle East, including *Transit Beirut* (2004) and *Transit Tehran: Young Iran and Its Inspirations* (2008). Former Managing Editor of the *Prince Claus Fund Library*, she was a founding editor of *Tank* magazine. She is editor-at-large for *Portal 9: Stories and Critical Writing about the City*, a new architectural biannual from Beirut. Most recently, Malu co-curated *Culture in Defiance* (2012) at the *Prince Claus Fund Gallery* — an exhibition that considered traditions of satire, art and the struggle for freedom in Syria.

FRIDAY FORUM

Friday 21 September at 15:00-18:00
 Tickets: £5\no concessions\ICA Members free

THE FRIDAY FORUM

The event will feature lively and provocative debate that questions the place of World Cinema in the current filmmaking landscape. The Friday Forum takes popular histories of Arab Cinema as a starting point, and will bring together internationally renowned experts and leaders from both the academic world and the film industry to debate the past, present and the future of Arab Cinema as a cultural form.

POPULAR ARAB CINEMA - ACADEMIC PERSPECTIVES

15:00 - 15:45

SPEAKERS:

DR VIOLA SHAFIK - Freelance filmmaker, curator and the author of *Arab Cinema: History and Cultural Identity* (1999) and *Popular Egyptian Cinema: Gender, Class and Nation* (2007)

DR DINA MATAR - SOAS, University of London. Head of the Centre of Media and Film Studies at SOAS, editor of the *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication*

ARAB CINEMA IN THE UK - THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE

15:45-16:40

SPEAKERS:

JASON WOOD - Director of Programming for the Curzon Cinema Group

MONA DEELEY - Founding Director of Zenith Foundation

ALI JAAFAR - Executive Director of Quinta Communications' independent film division and Programmer, London Film Festival.

Chaired by **OMAR KHOLEIF** - Curator of *Safar: A Journey Through Popular Arab Cinema*

ARAB CINEMA - IN PRACTICE

17:00-18:00

SPEAKERS:

HUSSEIN FAHMY - Egyptian screen icon and star of *Watch Out for Zouzou* (1971)

PHILIPPE ARACTINGI - Lebanese film director of *Bosta* (2005) and *Under the Bombs* (2007)

KHALID ABDALLA - British/Egyptian actor and star of *United 93* (2006) and *The Kite Runner* (2007)

Chaired by **BRIAN WHITAKER** - Former Middle East Editor of *The Guardian* and author of *What's Really Wrong with the Middle East* (2009)



BOSTA

FRIDAY 21 SEPTEMBER AT 20:30
 2005 | LEBANON

DIRECTOR: PHILIPPE ARACTINGI

RUNNING TIME: 112 MINS

CERT: PG

IN ARABIC WITH ENGLISH SUBTITLES



INTRODUCED BY PHILIPPE ARACTINGI, DIRECTOR OF BOSTA

The first post-war musical made in Lebanon and a box office record breaker, *Bosta* tells the story of Kamal as he returns from exile in France, determined to revive his school dance group. He and his friends are reunited and set out to give a modern flavour to the traditional Lebanese dance (dabke), injecting it with their alternative spirit. But when they audition for the national Anjar Dance Festival they are accused by the conservative judges of damaging Lebanon's last cultural icon and rejected. Undeterred, they defy the traditionalists by touring Lebanon aboard their old school bus (bosta), performing their new dance in rural villages. Philippe Aractingi's road-musical is an enduring pop classic exploring culture clashes and stars Nadine Labaki (star/director of *Where Do We Go Now?* and *Caramel*) in one of her first iconic roles.

PRESENTED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE DUBAI INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL - OFFICIAL PROGRAMMING PARTNER

WATCH OUT FOR ZOZOU

SATURDAY 22 SEPTEMBER AT 18:15

1971 | EGYPT

DIRECTOR: HASSAN AL IMAM

RUNNING TIME: 120 MINS

CERT: PG

IN ARABIC WITH ENGLISH SUBTITLES

INTRODUCED BY HUSSEIN FAHMY, STAR OF *WATCH OUT FOR ZOZOU*

Watch out for Zouzou is the legendary Soad Hosni's most famous film (Hosni is considered the 'Marilyn Monroe' of Arab cinema). Zouzou (Hosni) is a student who has paid her way through college by belly-dancing in her mother's troupe. She has kept this fact a secret, but has decided to give up dancing because she has fallen in love with her college professor (Hussein Fahmy). The Professor breaks off his own engagement but not before his fiancée discovers Zouzou's secret. Soad Hosni came back into public consciousness recently with visual artist Rania Stephan's epic homage *The Three Disappearances of Soad Hosni* (2011).



STRAY BULLET

SATURDAY 22 SEPTEMBER AT 20:50

2009 | LEBANON

DIRECTOR: GEORGES HACHEM

RUNNING TIME: 75 MINS

CERT: 12A

IN ARABIC WITH ENGLISH SUBTITLES

INTRODUCED BY TIM LLEWELLYN, FORMER BBC MIDDLE EAST CORRESPONDENT (BASED IN BEIRUT, 1975 - 1980)

This politically charged family melodrama is set in a northern suburb of Beirut at the end of summer 1976, just as Lebanon's long civil war is about to erupt. It follows bride-to-be Noha (played by Lebanese screen icon and director/star of *Caramel*, Nadine Labaki) in the run up to her wedding. Her family is relieved she is set to be a married woman and revel in arranging the last minute touches for the big day. To escape the pre-wedding frenzy, Noha sneaks off to the woods with her lover and discovers something devastating that changes her mind completely and forces her to take control of her own life. This sumptuously filmed melodrama won the Muhr Arab Award for Best Film at the 2010 Dubai International Film Festival.

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THE BEGINNING AND THE END

SUNDAY 23 SEPTEMBER AT 15:30

1960 | EGYPT

DIRECTOR: SALAH ABOUSEIF

RUNNING TIME: 125 MINS

CERT: 12A

IN ARABIC WITH ENGLISH SUBTITLES

INTRODUCED BY OMAR AL-QATTAN, FILMMAKER AND SECRETARY OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES, A.M. QATTAN FOUNDATION

Omar Sharif's final film before ascending to Hollywood stardom with *Lawrence of Arabia* is an adaptation from a novel by Nobel Laureate Naguib Mahfouz. *The Beginning and the End* was the first film adapted from Mahfouz's opus; his novels would later usher in some of the most significant films in Arab cinema's history. Directed by Salah Abouseif — one of Egypt's significant realist filmmakers — the film charts the life of a modest Egyptian family after their patriarch's death. Stricken by poverty, the family's lives unfold into dramatically different paths. In the end, the tension between pride, shame, and blind ambition seems to lead only to tragedy. Boasting one of the most notorious endings in Arab film history, this 35mm of *The Beginning and the End* is not to be missed.

PRESENTED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE EGYPTIAN NATIONAL FILM CENTER AND THE EGYPTIAN EMBASSY, LONDON



ALEXANDRIA, WHY?

SUNDAY 23 SEPTEMBER AT 18:00

1978 | EGYPT

DIRECTOR: YOUSSEF CHAHINE

RUNNING TIME: 127 MINS

CERT: 12A

IN ARABIC WITH ENGLISH SUBTITLES

INTRODUCED BY OMAR Kholeif, SAFAR CURATOR

Alexandria, Why? marked a radically introspective turn in auteur filmmaker Youssef Chahine's active career, as well as in the filmmaking of the Arab world more generally. It was a sharp departure from his 1950s musicals, melodramas and his later epic and political films. The first of Chahine's semi-autobiographical films, *Alexandria, Why?* focuses on a precocious adolescent whose dreams and colourful attempts to become an actor unfold against the vivid backdrop of Alexandria during World War II. A rich ensemble cast, which includes Ahmed Zaki and Farid Shawqi, inspires Chahine's young thespian hero with a wealth of dramatic subplots that capture both the uproarious and emotional aspects of wartime existence. The autobiographical nature and nostalgic flavour of *Alexandria, Why?* make it one of Chahine's most audience-friendly works, a charming and entertaining film that is a homage to the Hollywood musical, and delivers a potently impassioned message against conflict.



CAPTAIN ABU RAED

TUESDAY 25 SEPTEMBER AT 19:00

2007 | JORDAN

DIRECTOR: AMIN MATALQA

RUNNING TIME: 102 MINS

CERT: PG

IN ARABIC WITH ENGLISH SUBTITLES

POST-SCREENING Q&A WITH THE DIRECTOR AMIN MATALQA AND ACTOR NADIM SAWALHA

At the time of its release, *Captain Abu Raed* was the first Jordanian film produced in over 50 years. Abu Raed (Nadim Sawalha) is an airport cleaner who has always dreamt of seeing the world but only experienced it vicariously through books and brief encounters with air travellers. One day Abu Raed finds a pilot's cap and takes it to his poor neighbourhood where he has befriended a group of children. Believing that he is a retired pilot, the kids eagerly await to hear about Abu Raed's worldly adventures. As he takes the children on a fictionalized journey through his stories, he soon begins to discover that there is a grim reality in these children's lives that he must attempt to rectify. *Captain Abu Raed* is a universal story of friendship, inspiration and heroism, directed by one of the Arab world's most successful contemporary film directors.

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TERRORISM AND THE KEBAB

WEDNESDAY 26 SEPTEMBER AT 18:30

1993 | EGYPT

DIRECTOR: SHERIF ARAFA

RUNNING TIME: 105 MINS

CERT: 12A

IN ARABIC WITH ENGLISH SUBTITLES

INTRODUCED BY MALU HALASA, SAFAR WRITER-IN-RESIDENCE

One of the most popular Egyptian films of all time, *Terrorism and the Kebab* stars comedy legend Adel Imam — an actor often compared to Charlie Chaplin with respect to his physical versatility. *Terrorism and the Kebab* is a farce denouncing the absurdity of bureaucracy in modern Egypt. Adel Imam plays Ahmed, a father who wants to move his son to a school closer to home. He goes to one of the government's major administrative buildings, El-Mogamaa (the building in Tahrir Square that was heavily graffitied in the 2011 Egyptian Uprising), to pick up the required documents. Frustrated by the lack of response, he ends up attacking a government official and, when armed police respond to the situation, a machine gun accidentally finds its way into Ahmed's hands. In his new found position as a terrorist, Ahmed's demands to the Minister of Internal Affairs are simple: shish kebab made of highest-quality lamb. After having a hearty meal with his hostages, however, his demands become more political. Adel Imam was later tried on charges of blasphemy for his role in the film. This film will be popular with anyone who loved *Four Lions*, and is the first time it will be shown in the UK on the big screen.

PRESENTED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE EGYPTIAN NATIONAL FILM CENTER AND THE EGYPTIAN EMBASSY, LONDON

ONE-ZERO

WEDNESDAY 26 SEPTEMBER AT 20:30

2009 | EGYPT

DIRECTOR: KAMLA ABU ZEKRY

RUNNING TIME: 114 MINS

CERT: 15

IN ARABIC WITH ENGLISH SUBTITLES

POST-SCREENING Q&A WITH KHALED ABOL NAGA,
STAR OF *ONE-ZERO*

The only Egyptian film in recent memory to be led by an all female production team (director, writer, cinematographer and editor), *One-Zero* is a multi-strand narrative melodrama starring an all-star cast from the current Egyptian movie scene. Set on the eve of the 2008 African Nations Cup final, the film follows eight characters as they undergo tumultuous social complications. At times of frustration with political, economic and social realities, will the victory of the Egyptian football team consign everyday troubles to oblivion, even if only for one night? Or are the problems that conflict Egyptian society woven too deeply? This film was threatened with a lawsuit before it was even released for its portrayal of Coptic Christian marriage.

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FILM FESTIVAL - OFFICIAL PROGRAMMING PARTNER



THE YACUBIAN BUILDING

THURSDAY 27 SEPTEMBER AT 18:30

2006 | EGYPT

DIRECTOR: MARWAN HAMED

RUNNING TIME: 161 MINS

CERT: 15

IN ARABIC WITH ENGLISH SUBTITLES

POST-SCREENING Q&A WITH MARWAN HAMED, DIRECTOR OF *THE YACUBIAN BUILDING*

An eye-catching construction, the Yacoubian Building in Cairo was long regarded as the last word in comfort and elegance. Nowadays, the veneer has cracked and the shine has dulled to reveal the truth underneath the façade. Through the interwoven stories of a number of the residents, the film paints a portrait of corruption, fundamentalism, prostitution, homosexuality, and drugs in central Cairo and creates a vibrant but socially critical picture of contemporary Egypt. As polemical as it is nuanced, *The Yacoubian Building* was penned by leading Egyptian literary figure Alaa Al Aswany and adapted for the screen by director Marwan Hamed from a script by his father, Wahid Hamed. The film features an all-star cast which includes Adel Imam, Yousra, and Nour El-Sherif. At the time of its production, *The Yacoubian Building* was the most expensive Egyptian film ever made, and broke box office records on its release.

MARWAN HAMED

DIRECTOR OF THE YACoubIAN BUILDING



BIOGRAPHY

Marwan Hamed graduated from film school in 1999. During film school, he directed two short films including *Lilly*, based on the short story by Yusuf Idrees. His first feature film, *The Yacoubian Building*, was adapted from the international best-seller by Alaa Al Aswany, and was considered the most expensive Egyptian film ever made, featuring an Egyptian all-star cast including Adel Imam. Marwan won the best New Narrative Filmmaker Award at the Tribeca Film Festival 2006.

Marwan recently completed his part in the film *18 Days*, a collection of 10 short films by 10 Egyptian directors about the January 25th Revolution in Egypt. The film premiered at the 2011 Cannes Film Festival. Marwan has directed several television commercials and is a founder of the production company Lighthouse Films.



INTERVIEW WITH MARWAN HAMED

BY OMAR KHOLEIF, SAFAR CURATOR

WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE THE CHALLENGES FACING CONTEMPORARY FILMMAKERS IN EGYPT AND THE ARAB REGION MORE WIDELY?

We face many challenges. The main challenge is a funding crisis which directly affects the level of production. When you have an active market producers are more open to gambling on higher-risk projects. As things stand at the moment, producers want to play it safe; to secure box-office returns and make their money back. This means as an industry we are producing less so that the risks across the board are lower. Producers usually only finance mainstream films and comedies - and even then not many. You mainly see American blockbusters in Egyptian cinemas nowadays.

WHY DO YOU THINK THAT POPULAR EGYPTIAN CINEMA RARELY GETS THEATRICAL DISTRIBUTION IN THE UK?

I think there are two main reasons: first, our films do not necessarily travel well. Usually Arab films are dialogue-based and reading subtitles can diminish the audience's enjoyment of a film. Although film ought to be expressed more visually, I think we've adopted the use of dialogue from television. The second reason is marketing. A lot of Egyptian films have been great and had the potential to be exported but they were not marketed well and therefore lost out on their chance to be distributed internationally.

WHAT DO YOU THINK MAKES FILM PRODUCTION IN THE ARAB WORLD SO UNIQUE?

What makes us unique is our culture, history, our people and our heritage. Just put the camera in any street in Cairo and there is a story to be shot.

GROWING UP, WHAT WERE THE FILMS THAT INSPIRED YOU THE MOST? DID YOU HAVE A SPECIFIC MENTOR?

I was inspired by many films: *The Godfather*; *Taxi Driver*; *In the Mood for Love*; *Apocalypse Now*; the works of [Youssef] Chahine and Atef El-Tayeb. And I do have a mentor - Sherif Arafa. I worked as his assistant for 8 years and I owe him a great deal.

WE ARE OF COURSE SHOWCASING THE YACoubIAN BUILDING. WHAT COMPELLED YOU TO DIRECT THIS FILM?

One great thing about *The Yacoubian Building* for me is that it was about amazing characters - from a dramatic point of view, very complex characters. At the same time they were treated in a very non-judgemental way which pushes their humanity to very high levels. My favourite moments in the film, and indeed the novel, are those moments that express human weakness.

WHAT'S NEXT, AND DO YOU PLAN ON WORKING WITH YOUR FATHER AGAIN (WHO SCRIPTED YACoubIAN)?

I have a lot of projects in the pipeline but still haven't picked the next one. I hope to work with my father again.

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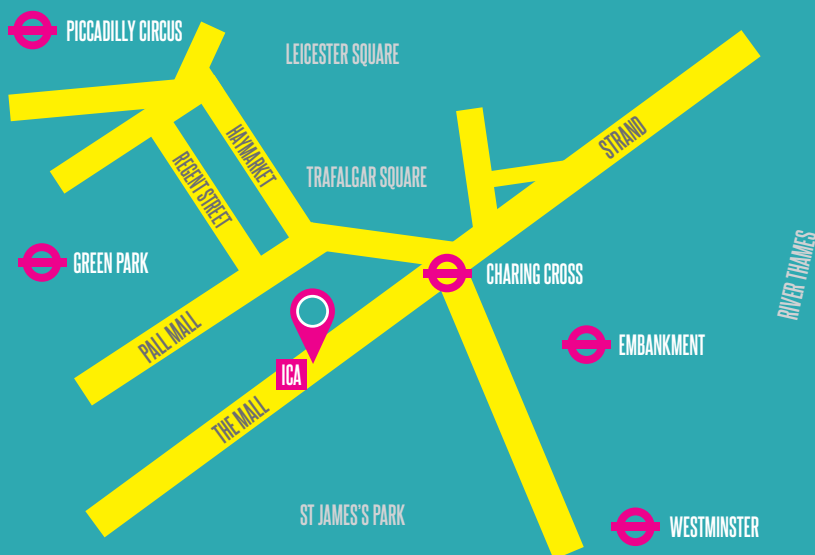
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Abdul Kader Bibi

Thank you

Noreen Abu Oun, Imogen Ware, Omar Kholeif

London, 2012



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POPULAR ARAB CINEMA

FILM TICKETS

Full: £10

Concessions: £8

ICA Members: £7

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