



## NEWS

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### IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## AANM FESTIVAL OFFERS RARE ARAB-THEMED FILMS

Dearborn, MI (October 3, 2007) – One film took home a 2006 Academy Award. Another was banned in its country of origin, though it features that nation’s biggest pop singer. The director of a third film armed himself with an AK-47 to ensure his project’s completion. And authorities in a world-famous city allowed feature-film cameras in for the first time ever on a fourth film.

These are some of the movies comprising the Arab American National Museum’s Third Annual Arab Film Festival, offering titles rarely, if ever, screened in Western countries outside of the film festival circuit. The Festival runs Friday, November 2 through Sunday, November 4, in the Museum’s intimate, 156-seat Auditorium.

The 10 festival films – five shorts and five features – originate from the U.S. and Arab countries including Egypt, Syria, Morocco, Lebanon, and even Iraq, where few indigenous films have reached Western audiences. The two opening night selections are English-language films; the rest of the festival selections are in Arabic with English subtitles, making them accessible to most viewers.

“The AANM’s Arab Film Festival seeks to enhance public knowledge and understanding about Arab Americans by showcasing alternative representations of Arab life,” says Ralph Valdez, Curator of Cultural Programming at the AANM. “We want to increase the exposure of Arab and Arab American filmmakers, and provide a forum for discussion of questions raised by films that challenge our beliefs.”

Among the highlights of this year’s Festival are:

**West Bank Story**, a comedic *West Side Story* takeoff set in the Middle East that was awarded the 2006 Oscar statuette for Best Short Film – Live Action.

**Ahlaam/Dreams**, whose director, Mohamed Al-Daradji, employed non-professional actors and armed himself against forces trying to halt his production in war-torn Baghdad.

**Dunia**, in which an anhedonic student of poetry and dance is mentored by an ardent intellectual portrayed by Mohamed Mounir, a pop music and film superstar in his native Egypt, which banned this film.

**Le Grand Voyage**, the first feature film ever to include authorized footage shot in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, the city all ardent Muslims must visit at least once.

A full rundown appears below; visit [www.arabamericanmuseum.org](http://www.arabamericanmuseum.org) to view the rundown with photos and to buy advance tickets online.

The Festival includes complimentary refreshments before and after screenings and during intermission, as well as two participatory panel discussions relating to film themes. Each screening or “package” includes one short subject and one feature-length film; individual tickets are \$5 (Museum Members, students and seniors) and \$6 per screening, or purchase a Festival Weekend Pass for \$20 or \$25 for admission to all screenings. Tickets are available at the door or in advance at [www.arabamericanmuseum.org](http://www.arabamericanmuseum.org).

The AANM’s Third Annual Arab Film Festival is presented with support from The Wallace Foundation, Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs, WDET 101.9 FM and Metro Times.

The Arab American National Museum documents, preserves, celebrates, and educates the public on the history, life, culture, and contributions of Arab Americans. We serve as a resource to enhance knowledge and understanding about Arab Americans and their presence in this country. The Arab American National Museum is a project of ACCESS, a Dearborn, Michigan-based nonprofit human services and cultural organization. Learn more at [www.arabamericanmuseum.org](http://www.arabamericanmuseum.org) and [www.accesscommunity.org](http://www.accesscommunity.org).

The Museum is located at 13624 Michigan Avenue, Dearborn, MI, 48126. Museum hours: 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Wednesday, Friday and Saturday; 10 a.m.-8 p.m. Thursday; noon-5 p.m. Sunday. Closed Monday, Tuesday; Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year’s Day. Admission is \$6 for adults; \$3 for students, seniors and children 6-12; ages 5 and under, free. Call 313-582-2266 for further information.

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**Third Annual Arab Film Festival**  
**November 2-4, 2007**  
**Arab American National Museum**

## **Friday, November 2**

6 p.m

### **Opening Night Reception**

Celebrate the opening of the AANM's Third Annual Arab Film Festival with complimentary refreshments and light fare in the Community Courtyard and a live performance by cutting-edge improvisational jazz guitar/percussion trio **Proyecto Corazon**.

### **Package A**

7 p.m.

#### **West Bank Story (ACADEMY AWARD WINNER)**

Dir: Ari Sandel

USA

22 minutes/2005

This film won the 2006 Academy Award for Best Short Film, Live Action; it's been screened at over 115 film festivals on six continents and won 25 awards. This musical comedy takeoff on *West Side Story* has competing falafel stands facing off instead of rival youth gangs. Israeli David falls in love with Palestinian Fatima against the backdrop of their families' dueling restaurants. This movie was shot in Santa Clarita, California, near Los Angeles, on a ranch where an Arab village was constructed for use in films. *English.*

**-and-**

7:30 p.m.

#### **Driving to Zigzigland (MICHIGAN PREMIERE)**

Dir: Nicole Ballivan

USA/Palestine

92 minutes/2006

A chronicle of a day in the life of a Palestinian cab driver in Los Angeles, *Driving to Zigzigland* portrays the social struggle of the Arab immigrant in post-9/11 America. A film audition typecasts Bashar to play an Al Qaeda terrorist role. Bashar's quest to make money succeeds until he realizes he must choose between the Department of Homeland Security and his family. Based on true stories; shot in Los Angeles and Palestine. Soundtrack by Arab music superstar Marcel Khalife. *English.*

**-plus-**

9 p.m.

**Audience discussion** with Waded Abed, co-founder of the Bustan Al-Funun Foundation, and film critic Serena Donadoni.

### **Saturday, November 3**

#### **Package B**

5 p.m.

#### **Heavy Metal Drummer**

Dir: Luke Morris and Toby MacDonald

Morocco

5 minutes/2005

This film is a celebration of rock music in the Arab World and a portrait of a music fan seeking to reconcile his love for heavy metal with the disapproving outside world. The young musician feels his talents as a percussionist are under-appreciated by his family, his school, and even his own bandmates. *Arabic with English subtitles.*

**-and-**

5:15 p.m.

#### **Le Grand Voyage (FIRST FEATURE SHOT IN MECCA, SAUDI ARABIA)**

Dir: Ismail Ferroukhi

France/Morocco

108 minutes/2004

Reda is taking his elderly father on the Hajj – the required Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca. But the old man insists on an arduous car ride to Saudi Arabia instead of an easy plane trip. Their journey is a spiritual venture that probes the depth of their faith and familial bond. This is the first feature film to be shot with official authorization in Mecca, Saudi Arabia; the road movie also includes on-location footage shot in France, Bulgaria and Turkey. *French and Arabic with English subtitles.*

**-plus-**

7 p.m.

**Audience discussion on the Politics of Identity** with Rima Hassouneh, lecturer at the University of Michigan – Ann Arbor; Najah Bazzy, transcultural nurse consultant; and Matthew Stiffler, graduate student in American Culture at the University of Michigan – Ann Arbor.

#### **Package C**

8:10 p.m.

#### **Make A Wish/Itmanna**

Dir: Cherien Dabis

Palestine

12 minutes/2006

A young Palestinian girl will do whatever it takes to buy a birthday cake. Mariam begs her mother for the extra money to spend at the local bakery. What begins as a simple trip to the store turns into a journey that depicts not only the subtle tensions of a politically

charged environment, but also illustrates the grief that can result from growing up under occupation. This film has been screened at both the Cannes and Sundance film festivals. *Arabic with English subtitles.*

**-and-**

8 :25 p.m.

**Ahlaam/Dreams**

Dir: Mohamed Al-Daradji (**DIRECTOR ARMED, KIDNAPPED IN PRODUCTION**)

Iraq

110 minutes/2005

*Ahlaam* tells the story of three Iraqis in Baghdad, where confusion, death, and uncertainty engulf the bombed ruins of a psychiatric asylum. It was made with non-professional actors on location in Baghdad in the immediate aftermath of war, under highly unstable political and military conditions. The production withstood gunfire, and the director and several crew were kidnapped and threatened with imprisonment and execution. Despite wielding an AK-47 in one hand and a camera in the other, director Mohamed Al-Daradji escaped with just an extreme interrogation. Amazingly, a majority of the footage survived. *Arabic with English subtitles.*

**Sunday, November 4**

**Package D**

1 p.m.

**These Girls/El-Banate Dol**

Dir: Tahani Rached

Egypt

68 minutes/2006

Already disadvantaged as impoverished, abused girls in a Muslim society, *These Girls* encounter rape, drug addiction, prostitution, pregnancy and motherhood on the streets. Neither their situation nor their courage is downplayed; the girls' camaraderie and joy shine through. This fresh, irresistibly lively, intensely engaging documentary from an acclaimed Egyptian director "...presents [the girls'] day-to-day lives with sympathy unadulterated by analysis or First World pity," said Jay Weissberg of *Variety*. It's been screened at the Cannes, Toronto, and New York film festivals. *Arabic with English subtitles.*

**-and-**

2:15 p.m.

**Dunia (BANNED IN EGYPT)**

Dir: Jocelyn Saab

Egypt

112 minutes/2005

Welcome to the world of Dunia, a student of poetry and belly dancing whose artistic expression is inhibited because she cannot experience desire. Mentored by the ardent public intellectual Dr. Beshir (played by Mohamed Mounir, Egypt's biggest pop star), Dunia begins an all-consuming search for ecstasy in poetry, music, and dance. Ultimately, Dunia must confront the traditions that have destroyed her capacity for pleasure before she can experience it. This film was banned by authorities in Egypt. *Arabic with English subtitles.*

**Package E**

4:15 p.m.

**Tank You**

Dir: Zaid Antar

Lebanon

11 minutes/2006

In the early days of the 2006 Israeli assault on the coastal city of Sidon, Lebanon, its roads and bridges were destroyed, cutting off any contact with the rest of the country. Fear of fuel shortages spread panic in the city. This video records a conversation with a woman who is waiting in a frustrated crowd at a gas station. *Tank You* made its international premiere at this year's Tribeca Film Festival in New York City. *Arabic with English subtitles.*

**-and-**

4:30 p.m.

**Under The Ceiling**

Dir: Nidal Al-Dibs

Syria

100 minutes/2004

Marwan and his group of friends are growing up in a poor section of Damascus, Syria. Only the love between Marwan and his girlfriend Lina can break the gloom that envelopes him following the death of a close friend, Ahmad, a man he idolized. Ahmad's sudden death unfurls an avalanche of emotions that have dogged Marwan, forcing him to question the values and beliefs he has held thus far. *Arabic with English subtitles.*

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