



5 Years of Passion

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During the 5th GFF's Press Conference

The Festival Must Go On

After taking control over a small fire that broke out in **El Gouna Conference and its Culture Center (Festival Plaza), El Gouna Film Festival (GFF)** continued its preparations for its 5th edition, which culminated in a press conference that was held today in an open-air theater that was specifically prepared for the event in the resort town of El Gouna.

The event, where the final details for **GFF's 5th edition** were unveiled, was attended by Engineer **Naguib Sawiris**, Founder of El Gouna Film Festival, Engineer **Samih Sawiris**, El Gouna Founder, Engineer **Omar El Hamamsy**, CEO of Orascom Development Holding (ODH), **Intishal Al Timimi**, GFF's Festival Director, **Bushra Rozza**, Co-Founder and Chief Operations and Foreign Relations Officer, **Amal El Masri**, Executive Director, **Amr Mansi**, Co-founder, and **Youssra**, a member of GFF's International Advisory Board, in addition to the attendance of **Amir Ramses**, Artistic Director, **Tarek Kamel**, CEO of O-West and **Tamer Dweidar**, CEO of Makadi Heights.

A number of GFF's confirmed jury members, such as Egyptian actress **Arwa Gouda** and Mexican producer and jury president of the **Feature Documentary Competition Martha Sosa**, were present as well.

It's All about Passion

Highlighting the fire breakout at the **Festival Plaza**, El Gouna Founder Engineer **Samih Sawiris** said: "We're



thankful that the fire didn't damage the main parts of the Festival Plaza. GFF's team members have perfectly handled the situation."

He also extended his gratitude to the security forces and the Red Sea Governorate's Civil Protective Forces and mentioned that he visited the hospital to check on the condition of the injured and found them all safe and sound with minor injuries. **Sawiris** also added: "Tomorrow, the attendees will not know where the fire occurred." Speaking about how the resort town of **El Gouna** welcomed the **GFF**, Engineer **Samih Sawiris**, Founder of El Gouna, said: "When I came here 32 years ago, I wasn't capable of imagining anything existing in El Gouna. Passion was my main drive in building the town of El Gouna as well as the festival." He added that the second factor of the success was the admiration that people hold for us. "Today, when the fire broke out, I found support from the Civil Protective Forces as well as the security forces and the Red Sea Governorate in addition to the support given to us by the Ministry of Health and Population and the Ministry of Culture." He added.

A short film displaying the past four years of **El Gouna Film Festival** was presented, showcasing a number of its unique moments as well as an assortment of facts and figures about **GFF**, **CineGouna Platform (CGP)**, and the Cinema for Humanity Audience Award.

A Promising Future

From his side, Engineer **Naguib Sawiris**, Founder of **El Gouna Film Festival** said that future editions will be more feasible, "thanks to Intishal Al Timimi, GFF's Festival Director, who is widely known in international cinematic circles." He added that securing the most recent cinematic works in the world is difficult as is convincing their filmmakers to attend. "If it wasn't for COVID-19, we would have hosted several international stars. We have proved ourselves over the past few years; now the important part is innovation for the upcoming ones."

Egyptian superstar **Youssra**, member of GFF's International Advisory Board, added: "GFF contributed to the diversity in the realm of film festivals. It inspired a lot of people, especially foreigners, and introduced a different side of Egypt, full of freedom and beauty and rich in touristic and cultural scenery."

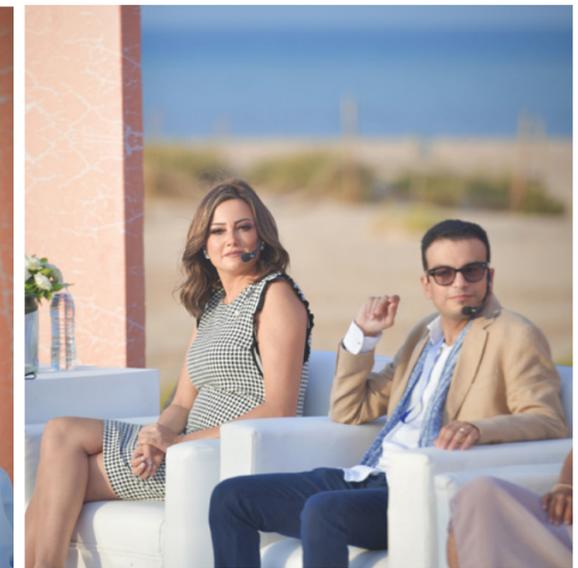
Engineer **Omar El Hamamsy**, CEO of Orascom Development Holding (ODH), said that this year, most of GFF's activities will be held in GCCC, which is an open-air center, making the screenings as well as other activities safe and enjoyable at the same time. He also mentioned that GFF held an agreement with the Ministry of Health and Population to vaccinate

all festival's guests and attendees. It's important to also note that all of the workers in El Gouna and at **GFF** are vaccinated. "We thank the **Ministry of Health and Population for its collaboration with us.**" **Amr Mansi**, Co-founder, from his part appreciated the role of the International Advisory Board, "Especially the Egyptian superstar **Youssra**, who has supported GFF since it first came to light," this as well as all our sponsors, partners, and ON TV, who have aided the festival since the very beginning.

A Record-setting Festival

Speaking about the participation of Arab films in **GFF's 5th edition**, **Intishal Al Timimi**, GFF's Festival Director, said that over the years, the festival has been successful in monopolizing the finest and most prominent Arab cinematic productions. Although, there is a strong competition over the inclusion of Arab films in any Arab film festival. He also added that this year, GFF broke a new record with seven Egyptian films in the festival's different sections and programs, while other film festivals face challenges in securing that number. "We constantly aim to make GFF a hub for Arab cinema," he added. **Al Timimi** announced the inauguration of **El Gouna Green Star Award**, which will be awarded for films that focus on environmental issues, adding that this was the goal of Engineer **Samih Sawiris**, first and foremost. The jury for **El Gouna Green Star Award** will include Egyptian actress **Arwa Gouda**. He also announced an initiative that will take place in **O West** Cairo throughout the year, in which a selection of GFF films will be screened.

Bushra Rozza, Co-Founder and Chief Operations and Foreign Relations Officer, from her side praised the GFF team members saying that "They are the unknown soldiers of the festival". Regarding the **CineGouna Platform**, she said that GFF's Festival Director **Intishal Al Timimi** is the one who insisted since the beginning to integrate **CineGouna Platform**, which includes the programs **CineGouna SpringBoard** that supports incomplete films and projects, and **CineGouna Bridge** that communicates with different organizations and holds high-caliber cinematic workshops, panels, and masterclasses. "The most important



aspect of CGP is its continuance throughout the year, with the inclusion of an annual program with **O West**, which will create a continuous contribution to the cultural realm throughout the year," she added.

Regarding GFF's film lineup, **Amir Ramses**, Artistic Director, said that GFF's lineup this year includes an immense number of award-winning films, including Venice Film Festival's Golden Lion Winner **Happening** as well as **Compartment no. 6**, winner of Cannes Film Festival's Grand Prize, in addition to a new film to the GFF lineup: Mamoru Hasoda's **Belle**, the winner of Locarno Film Festival's Locarno Kids Award. "This proves our vigilance in selecting quality films". Regarding the cancellation of the opening film, **Ramses** said, "The opening film was cancelled because of our cautiousness in screening films in the most optimum conditions and our respect for the filmmakers. This year, we do not have an opening film, but we have a film



that will inaugurate the red carpet screenings."

Amal El Masri, Executive Director, from her part talked about **Not the End**, which is a new initiative, in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture, to aid environmental sustainability. 10 fantastic designers will rework cinematic waste into works of art that will be auctioned off. "These are the types of initiatives that make Cinema for Humanity more than just a slogan."

“ We have proved ourselves over the past few years; the important part is innovation **Naguib Sawiris** ”

“ We constantly aim to make GFF a hub for Arab cinema” **Intishal Al Timimi** ”

“ Tomorrow, the attendees will not know where the fire occurred. **Samih Sawiris** ”

Celebrating Cinema à la GFF's Style

Through its past four editions, GFF has cemented its role as a laudable film hub for filmmakers across the region and successfully earned global recognition. Since its inception, the festival has saved no efforts in celebrating the art of cinema and its powerful impact as a means to bring people together. From 2017 to date, GFF has always gone beyond everyone's expectations, even surviving the worst conditions during the world's pandemic. As the 5th GFF is opening its curtains, we thought it's the best time to look back and celebrate GFF's milestones through the years.



Films with Wings

CineGouna SpringBoard and CineGouna Bridge, are the two arms of the festival's industry hub CineGouna Platform. It is a creative hub for minds and markets created to support and empower Egyptian and Arab filmmakers and help them find artistic and financial support. The previous editions of GFF, CineGouna Platform supported some of the Arab world's most remarkable film projects, which later received notable regional and international recognition. Three of these films have made it to the official selection of GFF 5th edition this year, landing their MENA premiere. These films include: *Costa Brava*, *Lebanon* by Lebanese filmmaker Mounia Akl, which had its world premiere in 2021 at Venice, and won the NETPAC Award at Toronto; *The Sea Ahead* by Lebanese Ely Dagher that premiered at Cannes 2021; and *Captains of Za'atari* by Egyptian director Ali El -Arabi, which premiered at Sundance 2021 and participated in several prestigious international film festivals.

Furthermore, some CineGouna SpringBoard alumnus were their countries' official submission at the Academy Awards' Best International Feature Film; namely: *Ameen Nayfeh's 200 Meters* (Jordan), *1982* by *Qualid Mouaness* (Lebanon), and *The Man who Sold His Skin* by *Kaouther Ben Hania* (Tunisia). Also, other winning films at CineGouna SpringBoard that later had their mark regionally and internationally are: *Noura's Dream* by *Hinde Boujemaa* (Tunisia), *Souad* by *Ayten Amin* (Egypt) and *Khartoum Offside* by *Marwa Zein* (Sudan).

GFF's Cinema for a Cause

Since its inception in 2017, El Gouna Film Festival has been committed not only to celebrate cinema in all its aspects, but it is also determined to support different causes in the aim of bringing people together. Therefore, it was natural to open its curtains in 2017 with the Cinema for Humanity to recognize the influence of the art of filmmaking to positively impact the industry, new talent, and the social community as well as the world at large. Among the causes GFF has supported was refugees, women empowerment, and sustainability. It also forged partnerships with several entities through the years, including: UNICEF, UNDP, the Sawiris Foundation, UNHCR, and the U.S. Embassy.

This year, GFF launches the inaugural edition of its newly introduced **Green Star Award** to commemorate films that highlight environmental causes. Reviewed by a jury that specializes in environmental films, the festival will boast five films that address environmental causes in the 5th edition of GFF that vie for

a certificate and a cash prize of **US \$10,000**.

Furthermore, GFF will host the 2nd edition of the **Sunbird Stories** program, launched by **Filmlab: Palestine and Cinephilia Productions**, which is set to support short films centered around and made for children and adolescents in the Arab world. For the next three editions of GFF, **Sunbird Stories** will be presenting its prizes in its workshop's finale, set to take place during the activities of **El Gouna Film Festival**.

Another change is taking place for this edition of GFF, regarding the **FIPRESCI Prize**. For our upcoming 5th edition, it was agreed that the **FIPRESCI Prize** would shift its direction to be presented to the best Asian or African filmmaker's debut film, varying greatly from past editions wherein this prize was awarded to the best Arab film.



The Sound of Music

As part of El Gouna Film Festival's commitment to celebrate all aspects of cinema and art, the festival launched the **Cinema in Concert** initiative at its 2nd edition, is an event that is dedicated to paying homage to the timeless works of music scores that accompanied some of the world cinema's indelible films.

A musical tribute to Egypt's iconic director Youssef Chahine was conducted at the 2nd GFF second marking a decade of his passing. The event was parallel to a special programme featured a screening of his newly restored masterpiece *The Emigrant*, an exhibition of posters and paraphernalia and, most remarkably, a short montage of Chahine's scenes by filmmaker Amir Ramsis the Artistic Director of GFF to accompany a live performance of Chahine's film scores recomposed by the celebrated composer-conductor Hisham Gabr. The visuals also included photos of Chahine on locations, and sound bites from interviews with the late legendary filmmaker.

In the 3rd edition of GFF, and in cooperation with the U.S. Embassy in Egypt, **Cinema in Concert** paid tribute to timeless works of music that accompanied some of the most memorable films. The concert was conducted by Maestro Ahmed El Saedi, Founder and Chairman of the Egyptian Philharmonic Society, with the performance of soloists Janet Sung on violin, Federico Mondelci on saxophone, Victoria Kapralova on violoncello, accompanied by the vocal performance of Amina Khairat.

In 2020, GFF's fourth edition continued its **Cinema in Concert** festival fixture, featuring an orchestral performance of film scores of classics and audience favorites. A newly restored copy of *The Kid* by Charlie Chaplin was screened, accompanied by an orchestra led by Maestro Ahmed El Saedi.



Moving Stills

El Gouna Film Festival has always had its exquisite style of celebrating the art of cinema and filmmaking. Through its previous festival editions, GFF celebrated the art of film posters, and films' masterpiece shots, capturing the filmmakers' watershed moments and special landmarks.

In its inaugural edition, the festival organized an exhibition for a distinguished collection of remarkable Egyptian and Arab film classics. In 2018, GFF, paid a tribute to three of the world's legendary filmmakers; **Youssef Chahine**, **Ingmar Bergman**, and **Federico Fellini** through three well-curated exhibitions. **Chahine's** exhibition was commemorating the 10th anniversary of his passing with an expo of his films' posters and some of his belongings, the other exhibition featured posters of films by **Federico Fellini** in remembrance of the 25th anniversary of his passing, and the third displayed photographs of the salient Swedish director **Ingmar Bergman** capturing his most remarkable career moments, which was organized in coordination with the Swedish Embassy and the Swedish Film Institute. The exhibition also was accompanied by two film screenings from the archive of the legendary filmmaker.

In 2018, the 3rd GFF commemorated the centennial of the late legendary Egyptian writer/journalist **Ihsan Abdel Quddous** through a Retrospective Exhibition. The special event included **Abdel Quddus'** handwritten notes of both fiction and journalistic pieces, putting a large collection of his works on display. The author's prestigious

certificates of appreciation, exquisite furniture, magnificent paintings, rare photographs, as well as his honorary decorations and awards were also part of the exhibition. In 2020, GFF granted prominent Egyptian Art Director **Onsi Abou Seif** its prestigious Career Achievement Award for his distinctive and influential participation in the art scene. In this context, **El Gouna Film Festival** hosted an exhibition of **Abou Seif's** works, including some of his designs, sketches, and video clips from his films, movie posters, as well as some of the awards that he has received over the course of his career.



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“ Cinema in concert pays homage to the timeless works of music scores in the world cinema's indelible films



Receiving GFF's Career Achievement Award A Chronicle of the Journey of Ahmed El Saka



Zein El Abdeen
Khairy

Opening scene of *Shorts, T-shirt, and a Cap* (2000), by director Saeed Hamed, **Ahmed El Saka** makes his first appearance from afar, riding on a horse through the dust, making his way towards the camera. He gracefully gets off the horse to the ground, to hop in a Jeep, which he drives away fast.

This was not just an opening scene in the history of **Ahmed El Saka's** career as a leading star, but it was more of a manifesto of his journey of stardom. This perfectly depicts his path towards the top as a high-caliber star for the next 20 years, which well-deservedly qualifies him to be the superstar to receive the **Career Achievement Award** of the 5th edition of **El Gouna Film Festival**. **El Saka** is receiving this award as a

trailblazer of modern action cinema in Egypt and the Arab world. By action cinema, we don't exclusively mean the dangerous stunts, car chases, and thriller combats, but also the action films that detail the dreams and disappointments of the youth, their every-day battles and conflicts, representing their thoughts, aspirations, and even their simple style to dress most of the time as in *Shorts, T-shirt, and a Cap*.

At the time, the Egyptian film industry was recovering from a recession that lasted for several years. The tremendous success of the film *Ismailia Rayeh Gai* has paved the way for a new generation of stars under the lead of the Comedian star Mohamed Heneidy, whose success was a catapult to the stardom of a

new generation, and the element that brought back stars from the older generation to the fore lines of the box office. This included **Ahmed El Saka**, who starred in supporting roles in Heneidy's first leading-role-films; *An Upper Egyptian at the American University* (1998), and *Hammam in Amsterdam* (1999), both directed by this generation's godfather Saeed Hamed. In the heels of these two blockbuster films, **El Saka** was then picked up to land his first leading role in *Shorts, T-shirt, and a Cap*, where he proved to be the perfect embodiment of the youth of this generation at the time.

Following the tremendous success of the film, **El Saka** headlined multiple blockbusters, including; *Africano* (2001), *Mafia* (2002), *Tito* (2004), *Italia's War* (2005), *About Love and Passion* (2006), *Taymour and Shafika* (2007), *El Gezira* (2007), *Ibrahim Labyad* (2009), *The Dealer* (2010), *The Consul's Son* (2010), and the list goes on. These films proved paid off the hard work and the risk **El Saka** has taken by introducing himself in the genre of film that he aspired to, away from the comedian cinema that witnessed his beginnings and was the



catalyst of his stardom. This genre of cinema was one of the biggest waves in the history of Egyptian cinema that brought to the forefront a new generation of comedians who were then dubbed "neo-comedians", which included: Mohamed Heneidy, Alaa Wali El Din, Ashraf Abdel Baqi, Ahmed Adam, Salah Abdallah, and Hani Ramzy, who were later joined by Mohamed Saad, Ahmed Helmy, Karim Abdel Aziz, Ahmed Eid, and Ahmed Rizk.

New Horizons

Ahmed El Saka was able to open new horizons to himself after venturing into the action genre, which was for long exclusively led by Karate, and Kung Fu champions Youssef Mansour and El Shahat Mabrouk, and breaking away from the comedian genre where he presented supporting roles opposite Mohamed Heneidy. In doing so, **El Saka** became a role model for many others of his peers to make their own breakthroughs in other genres than the comed, including Ahmed Ezz, Amr Waked, Moustafa Shaaban, Hani Salama, and Khaled Abol Naga.

From his early beginnings, **El Saka** had his eyes set on his goals. He worked so hard to qualify himself for his career path, deploying his tools; acting talent, and personal skills and traits, he committed himself to workouts and exercised like athletes, his physical abilities included horse riding, car racing, mountain climbing, swimming and diving. All these skills prompted his name to be the most credible action star, which was rarely present in any of his peers. To date, **El Saka** still insists on performing his own stunts, making dangerous scenes in high physical ability in all of his roles, be it on the silver screen or in serial dramas.

The Down-to-earth Star

El Saka is one of the most down-to-earth stars who is best known for his chivalry traits among his peers. He is one of the most high-caliber stars who appeared as a guest-star in multiple works in cinema and on TV. Since the dawn of his stardom, he didn't hesitate to make guest-star appearances in several films, such as: *Rasha Garee'a*, *Days of El Sadat*, *Hamada Ye'laab*, *Ala Gamb Yasta*, *Sameer & Shaheer & Baheer*, *Over My Dead Body*, *No Surrender*, *Wannabe*



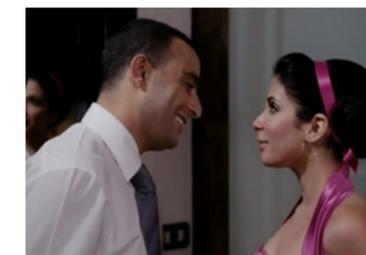
Courageous, and *The Money*. He also made cameo appearances in serial drama, including: *Leqa'aa Ala El Hawa*, *Cindrella*, *Critical Moments*, *Tamer & Shawkeya 3*, *Super Heneidy 2*, *The Clinic 2*, *Raheem*, *Sukkar Ziada*, and *The Choice*.

A Rough Ride

Some people might mistakenly think that **Ahmed El Saka** has easily found his path to stardom with the help of the acquaintances of his father, the salient Salah **El Saka**, Egypt's pioneer of the puppet theatre. However, it took **El Saka** 13 years before his name was prompted to the top of the credits of films and TV dramas. He kick started his acting career at a young age in small TV roles in 1987 in **Ma'a Martabat Al Sharaf**, and **Al Asl Dawar**. This was long before he landed his notable performance in **El Nawa** in 1991, which however was overlooked by several producers and filmmakers, so he continued to present small roles in different plays, TV dramas, and films until he was picked by director Karim Diaa Eddine for the TV film *The Ferryman* in 1995, where his name finally was prompted to the forefront following the superstars Salah El Saadani, Maali Zayed, and Mamdouh Mwafy, and ahead of the names of salient stars including Lotfy Labib, and Ahmed

Akl. Afterwards, **El Saka** starred in remarkable TV hits including *Rabie's Other Half* and *Who Doesn't Love Fatima?* (1996), *Zizinia* and *The Upper Egyptian's Dream* (1997), and TV film *Marriage on Sullivan Paper* (1998). All these works paved the way for the superstar's success in the first quarter of the new millennium.

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