

ELGOUNA
FILM FESTIVAL
1ST EDITION
مهرجان الجونة السينمائي

EL GOUNA STAR



**WHITAKER AND SAWIRIS PARTNERS
FOR A HUMANITARIAN CAUSE**



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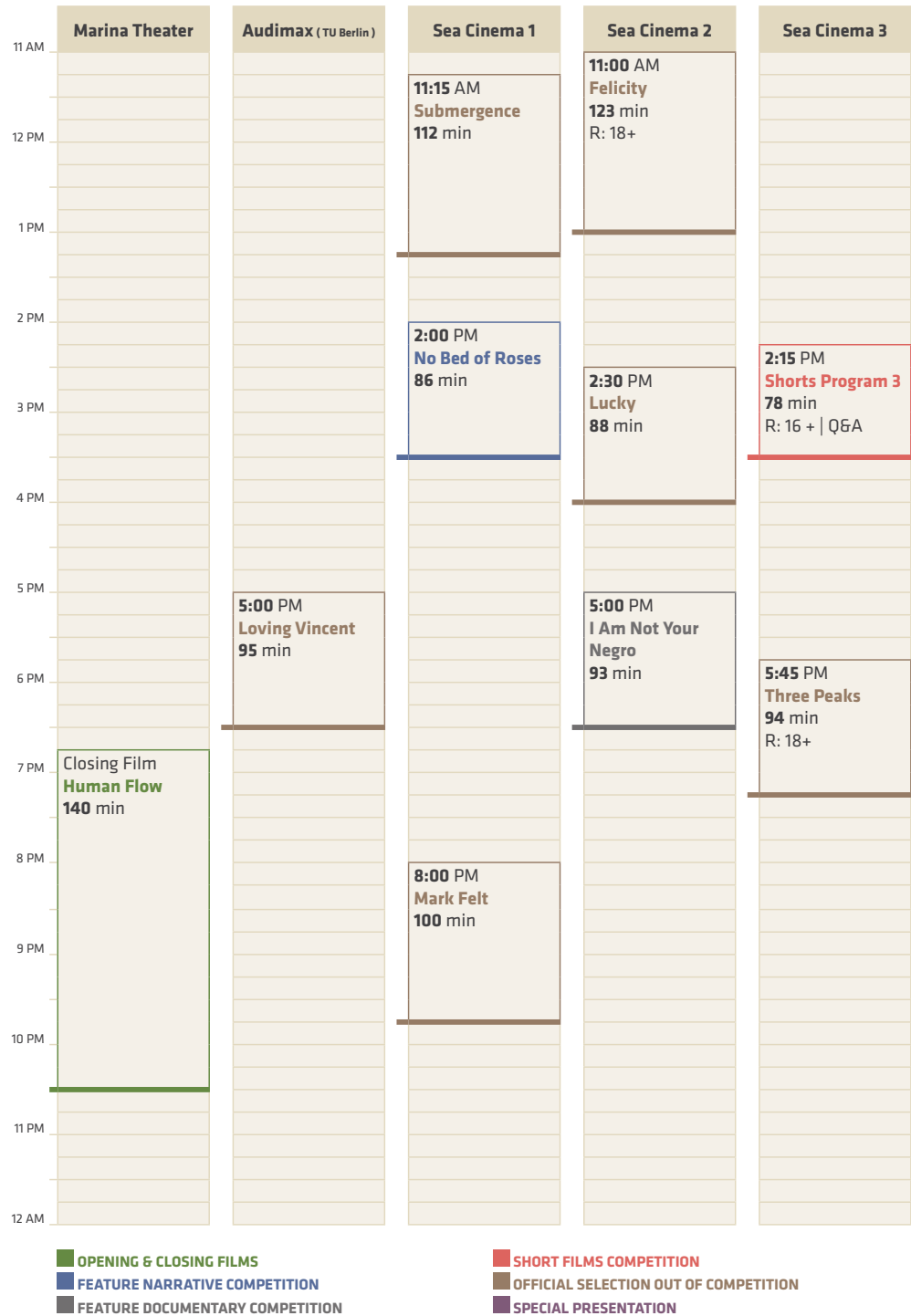
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FRIDAY 29TH SEPTEMBER 2017



MASTERCLASSES



BY THE AMERICAN FILMMAKER
Oliver Stone
 10:30 AM at AudiMax



ACTING: THE ART OF THE CRAFT
 By **Forest Whitaker**, Moderated by **David D'Arcy**
 12:30PM at AudiMax

WHITAKER AND SAWIRIS PARTNERS FOR A HUMANITARIAN CAUSE



A press conference was held yesterday 28th September 2017 to announce a partnership between the Egyptian business man and the founder of El Gouna Film festival GFF Naguib Sawiris and the renowned American artist Forest Whitaker the founder and CEO of Whitaker Peace & Development Initiative (WPDI).

(WPDI) is a non- profit, non- governmental organization founded in 2012 by Forest Whitaker to harness the potential of vulnerable youth for peace through meditation, non- violence, reconciliation and entrepreneurship in fragile contexts. The partnership aims at mobilizing young people of South Sudan in the Service of Peace. From his part Whitaker appreciated the partnership saying that it is great for (WPDI) to add to its global network an Egyptian partner "our organization seeks to make a difference on the ground by educating, equipping, and mobilizing young leader through a combination

of strategies, including capacity building, developing connectivity and providing support to economic and cultural community projects in communities impacted by conflict." He explains "being here and having such a cooperation with Naguib Sawiris is such a great addition to our efforts for the South Sudanese people who have experienced war for 43 years".

From his part said Naguib Sawiris that this partnership is not only important as a humanitarian cause, but also because he personally has a long and fruitful relationship with both North and South Sudan for long years "Sudanese people for us are no different than Egyptians. We share the same background, same traditions, and same religious, so I have a feeling that I am serving my brothers and my community just like what Am I doing here in Egypt".

Both of Sawiris and Whitaker emphasized the importance of art in all the social impact projects "Art was always an essential part of our work in South Sudan, because music and cinema are eye openers for people to the world and it also a bridge that get people close to each other" said Whitaker. From his part Naguib Sawiris talked about the efforts he had done in Egypt to support film production and promoting cinema culture in the Egyptian society "a good film with a real social impact will always be a passion for me to support and to co-produce"

American Actor and Director Forest Whitaker to receive Career Achievement Award for his distinguished artistic and humanitarian activities at the closing ceremony of El Gouna Film Festival to be held on September 29.

Nahed Nasr

CINGOUNA SPRINGBOARD AWARDS ANNOUNCED

El Gouna Film Festival announced today the awards winning of the Egyptian Critic Association FECA and the CINGOUNA Springboard projects.

Samir Farid Award for the best film went to the long narrative feature Scary Mother by the Georgian film director Ana Urushadze, starring Nato Murvanidze and Dimitri Tatishvili.

The film is also an award winning of four international awards: Best First Feature and Youth Jury Award from Locarno International Film Festival 2017 where it was also nominated for the Golden Leopard , Filmmakers of the Present. It also won the Cineuropa Award and Heart of Sarajevo for the best film from Sarajevo Film Festival 2017 .

Regarding the CINGOUNA Springboard projects,

El Gouna Film Festival Award, \$20.000 went to Egyptian Director Sherif El Bendary for his film project Two Rooms and A Parlor. New Century Production Award, \$10.000 went to the film project Costa Brava by the Lebanese film director Mounia Akl. Creativity Award (Ebdaa)award, \$10.000 went to the film project Abo Zaabal 1989 by the Egyptian film director Bassam Mortada. Mentor Arabia for Children and Youth Empowerment Award, \$5.000 went to the film project 200 Meters by the Palestinian film director Ameen Nayfeh. Film Factory for Movie Production Award, \$5.000 went to the film project Backstage by Tunisian film director Afef Ben Mahmoud. Aroma Studios Award, \$5.000, went to the film project Noura In The Wonderland by Tunisian filmmaker Hinde Boujemaa. Aroma

CINEGOUNA *platform*

Studios Award, \$5.000 for projects in progress went to the film project Youmeddine by the Egyptian film director Abu Bakr Shawky.

El Gouna Film Festival director Intishal Al Tamimi who was present in the ceremony expressed his pleasure with the efforts done by all the young filmmakers who have their projects selected in CINGOUNA Springboard «all the film projects including those which did not win an award deserve to be screened at the coming editions of The GFF, and to participate in many other international festivals because of their artistic quality. I am so proud of all of you» said Al Tamimi.

Nahed Nasr

BUSHRA: REACHING THE OTHER



As an actress, singer and film producer as well as a radio and television hostess, Bushra has proved herself a versatile figure. She is adding to her considerable CV the experience of founding and organising a film festival at Gouna – which she is finally in a position to evaluate from beginning to end.

How did you embark on founding and organising El Gouna Film Festival, and what preparations and prior measures were taken beforehand?

Founding and organising a film festival along the lines of successful world events is no easy dream to contemplate, especially since this festival bears additional responsibilities like reaffirming Egypt's artistic centrality and its pioneering role in producing strong and successful film festivals that are in no way inferior to regional or world events. This, in addition to promoting tourism and attracting a greater number of tourists to Egypt during the festival's duration – which is what happened with the French city of Cannes when, following the establishment of a film festival there, it became a tourist as well as an artistic hub.

I cannot claim that El Gouna Film Festival was my dream alone. I am sure it was an idea that played with the minds of any number of film professionals and intellectuals interested in Egypt's place on the cinematic and tourist maps. But by God's grace I managed to place all these ideas and dreams in a single package and add to them my own personal dream of starting a festival in Gouna; then I took the initiative in a serious and practical way. The fates decree that certain people at certain times will take actions to bring about something they is written, I feel.

But how did things actually happen?

It all started when my friend the singer Mahmoud El Esssaily invited me to sing with him for the El Gouna World Squash Championship. There I made the acquaintance of Amr Mansi, who heads the committee that organises the tournament; he received a letter of thanks from the World Squash Federation in addition to acclaim from the participating players and their delegations. So Amr Mansi and I approached my friend Kamal Zadah about founding and organising an international film festival with a tourist dimension in Gouna, which we were all already in love with.

And so we started broaching the subject with businessmen Naguib and Samih Sawiris who were both enthusiastic. They cooperated on funding the festival, the first time the two brothers have ever worked together in their long business careers. This had to do with Naguib's love of cinema, of course; he previously supported the Cairo International Film Festival. Of course it is Samih who founded the city of Gouna 25 years ago. Before he came along the area was just sand, and he converted it into a complete integrated city with all the services, visited by tourists from all over the world.

When the World Squash Championship was established Samih said he'd already had the idea for a long time, but ideas remain in people's heads until they come across someone they can trust and depend on who will accept the responsibility to join in implementing them. The squash tournament was the trigger-off point that brought us all together and encouraged us to start this festival.

What attracted you to this idea and drove you to take the initiative?

Because I am concerned with both tourism and cinema. I studied at the Faculty of Tourism and Hotel Management and worked in tourism for a period of time. I also starred in many films, and worked in film productions, and travelled to important international festivals like Cannes and Venice. So I had experience in and passion for both sides of the proposed event. What encouraged me further was my long-standing friendship with Naguib Sawiris, which started when I was singing in Mobinil advertisements and came in contact with him. This made me familiar with his personality. Now, knowing how much he loved the cinema, I was reassured of his support for this project. I was also encouraged by Amr Mansi's success with the squash tournament.

Can you tell us about your exact role in El Gouna Festival?

I am the director of operations, and my task is to supervise all the festival's sections. Under the directorship's umbrella there are eight different departments working side by side. One department deals with the technical side of films, copying and projection; another organises screenings; a third is in charge of travel arrangements and hospitality; a fourth organises conferences and seminars; and so on. My role is to follow all these departments' work and make sure it is progressing in the best way possible; it is more exhausting than I can begin to describe.

What's the difference between El Gouna and other film festivals in Egypt?

El Gouna Film Festival is the first film festival to be founded and organised by the private sector; and it is well known that the private sector does not waste money or make room for egos. This means that every millieme spent is calculated to bring in many times its worth in success and sustainability. The state does sponsor El Gouna Festival through the culture and tourism ministries, but this is an honorary sponsorship that doesn't involve spending any financial support.

The festival, what is more, is based on the effort and ideas and energy of young people. People under 40 make up over 80 percent of the staff. This makes it a vital event different in its organisation and planning, and demonstrates to interested parties that the Egyptian youth deserves every chance it can get and is capable of creating a world-class event that competes with festivals worldwide.

The young people, for their part, have gained experience enough to ensure effective festival organisation in Egypt in the future. This is especially urgent in the light of the fact that in Egypt those who organise such events are by and large older people who might not have what it takes to renew and modernise festival organisation. Youth empowerment is a priority long overdue by now.

The El Gouna Festival is not a red carpet affair where stars are photographed while they give interviews to the media followed by a closing ceremony. It does not start and end, like some such festivals, without providing the country or filmmakers with any sizeable benefit. At Gouna we offered meaningful financial awards to all the winners.

We also launched the El Gouna Platform with a view to extending bridges between young talented writers and directors on the one hand and major producers, distributors and filmmakers on the other. This gives young filmmakers the chance to meet and interact with a view to their projects obtaining support and to them forming production companies. I think this is an important step, equivalent to the Final Cut initiative at Venice Film Festival. In the future we

hope to institute a film market in the manner of major world festivals too.

At the same time as the first round of El Gouna Film Festival was launched, the Sharm El Sheikh Asian and African Film Festival failed. What are some of the advance measures and precautions that were taken to ensure Gouna's success and avoid such shortcomings of Egyptian festivals as bad organisation, fights among media personnel and other problems?

Very sadly I did not follow the Sharm El Sheikh Asian and African Film Festival. I only read about what happened there in the newspapers, which was definitely upsetting since this is an event that bears Egypt's name after all. But in reality I have no right to comment on other Egyptian festivals, since every festival has its own management working under its own, inevitably different conditions.

All I can say about El Gouna Festival is that huge efforts went into it, organisationally and intellectually. We undertook numerous rehearsals to see how best to bring it out in a way of which we can be proud, ensuring the comfort of the stars and the filmmakers we're hosting. And we established a strong media centre capable of dealing with Arab and foreign as well as Egyptian journalists efficiently and professionally.

In this way we are trying to generate a new festival culture in Egypt, and in addition to wonderful financial support Naguib and Samih Sawiris have provided everything they could to make the festival a success. The festival management travelled to major festivals like Cannes and Venice to meet stars and producers and industry professionals and negotiate with them bringing over their new films. And despite some of them having reservations about the Middle East or even refusing to travel there because of violence and terrorism, they all agreed that our approach and method of negotiation helped to change their mind since they sensed we were serious and professional.

In the end many enthusiastically agreed to take part whether in one of the official competition branches or on the fringe. They were especially encouraged by the slogan, "Cinema for humanity".

Egypt participated in the long fiction film competition with "Sheikh Jackson" and "Photocopy" – even though the dearth of cinema has been such that we struggle to find enough films to participate in local, Arab and international festivals.

Our problem in Egypt is qualitative, not quantitative. We have dozens of commercial films that are screened for the audience during specific seasons

like Eid Al Fitr and Eid Al Adha and the mid-year break to bring in a fast revenue. What we struggle to find are films of sufficient quality and sophisticated enough standards to qualify for festivals. This is not to deny the existence of sincere producers with a sense of responsibility to the industry, like those who produced the two films participating in the official competition and others. If not for such producers Egypt would have no place on the world festival map; that is why the state should support them and open the door to new producers of their calibre in the following years.

How happy are you with the first round of the festival and what will you modify or avoid in future rounds?

The first round is not an easy achievement. The first round is akin to the pilot episode of a television series or the zero issue of a publication – experimental. In this round we made as much effort as we could, and we registered all the positive elements we could see, the better to emphasise and endorse them in future rounds.

Foremost among these is the fact that we managed to speak to "the other" in the other's language, in a language they can understand. This, following years during which we could only speak to ourselves as Egyptians. We used cutting-edge equipment and technology, and we participated in the Venice Film Festival's Final Cut, where we gave an award of US\$5,000 to an Arab project. This is because we are seeking to establish our presence at international events as the El Gouna Festival.

There are also some negative elements that we will cooperate to fix or avoid in the future. One thing we'd didn't like was the fact that the screenings were not open to the Hurghada audience. But this was beyond our control since at this stage of its development the festival required a huge amount of technical preparation and we barely had enough seats for our guests. We therefore rested content with five large theatres fit for a contemporary festival: we built one, renovated three abandoned ones and incorporated the university theatre at TU Berlin Campus El Gouna.

As of the second round, however, we plan on expanding our operations and screening for all of Hurghada, spreading out of Gouna, since the point of an international festival – as well as artistically attracting world stars and drawing in tourists from all over the world – is to reach the ordinary audience and improve their cinematic awareness and taste. That is what we plan on doing.

Interviewed by Sherif Abdel Hadi



The Co-founders of the festival (from left) Kamal Zadeh, Amr Mansi and Bushra

“RUE DE LA VICTOIRE”: CIRCUS OF LIFE

In a meticulously orchestrated opening we are introduced to Mohamed Dhia Garbi, a 26-year-old Tunisian circus artist, in his natural habitat, where his identity is divided in two: Mohamed, the name that his family calls him by, and Barura, the mocking name he goes by in the neighbourhood. This double identity is one of the most important conflicts in Canadian director Frederique Curnoyer Lessard's *Rue de la Victoire*, the name of the street where Gharbi resides in the small city of Ezzahra south of the Tunisian capital, as well as a small nod to the way he deals with the world.

Rue de la Victoire recounts Gharbi's life in the years that follow the Tunisian Revolution. It starts with a lyrical monologue told by our protagonist's alter ego, before it takes us with him to his old circus school, now closed. Lessard comes back to this school and its significance in our protagonist's life later in the film, using a clear dramatic technique that distinguishes her entire documentary.

In front of the school, Gharbi gives away his problem, which is his desire to leave Tunisia. Starting this moment the film exposes the reasons behind his decision, as the director takes us on a journey introducing us to Gharbi's familial and social background. A conservative environment that emotionally contains our protagonist and at the same time logically and traditionally rejects him. But this isn't Gharbi's only reason. In addition to his sense of alienation in a world where the people closest to him view his passion towards circus as a mere joke, his frustration at the corruption case that led to the final shutdown of his circus school after the revolution constitutes his other motive. This act ends in another



poetic monologue where the director plays on the border between the real and the imagined before moving with the character to France, where he works in a circus troupe.

Gharbi finds what he's looking for in France, success and artistic achievement. To him it is a serious chance to develop his talent and to embrace his true love of circus arts. But in a biting paradox, he keeps on missing the same thing he ran away from; family, companionship, and home itself. In one of the most insightful scenes in the film we see Gharbi sitting with his family after his return, telling them that he will show them a film that summarizes his life in the two years that he spent in France. The film includes a personal monologue told by Gharbi, recounting his

life and the reasons that pushed him towards leaving Tunisia. His brothers react with mockery and laughter, while intense worry appears on his mother's face.

Faithful to its optimistic title, the film comes to a liberating end with another poetic monologue, as if closing the parenthesis it opened with the opening scene. We see Gharbi's body breaking free with his cyr wheel over one of the city's roofs, in a scene that highlights one of the film's most notable points of strength: the aesthetics of physicality in relation to the character and his surroundings.

Rue de la Victoire premiered in the Hot Docs Canadian International Film Festival 2017.

Mohamed El-Hajj

“78/52”: ELEGANT HORROR SCENES

Almost 60 years after it was made, Alfred Hitchcock's «Psycho» still draws attention. Craft and mystery, industry and politics, psychology and history, every little aspect of this great classic stood under close examination for decades and yet it still manages to surprise and inspire awe and wonder.

Alexander O. Philippe's *7852/* is a film that's solely dedicated to a process of deliberate dissection to the shower scene in Hitchcock's classic «Psycho». With stellar names of directors, and film artists such as veteran director and film historian Peter Bogdanovich and Academy Awards winners and nominees Walter Murch, Bob Murawski, Gary Rydstrom, Chris Innis, Guillermo Del Toro and Danny Elfman, the film rests heavily on interview. But despite this fact there's never a dull moment, as the film chases rapidly through the multiple levels of this utterly intricate work of art.

The film unfolds starting with stating the massive shooting that this exact scene required to get done –hence the title of the film, 78 camera setups and 52 cuts to compose the scene- it then moves to explaining the context, Psycho's place in history, film history, American socio-political history in the 40's and the 50's and even Hitchcock's own history. *7852/* makes the connection between the film and its maker in a solid mental structure relating it to his obsessions, rivalries, and even career choices.

Half way through the film we get to the making of the scene itself, tackling every possible angle, starting with how it begins, to camera placement,

editing, music, even art direction and sound design, closing with Janet Leigh final gaze and the moral weight of his cheeky McGuffin. The film excels –as it does to the rest of its acts- in placing all these elements in a way that feels very dramatic though it isn't really.

In 2015 the documentary *Hitchcock/ Truffaut*, director Kent Jones also looked on the legendary director's legacy, especially in relation to the monumental interview and the relationship between the two artists. *7852/* follows after the passion that drove Jones in making his film, yet he covers not only who Hitchcock was, but a whole cultural and artistic havoc that wreaked over American –and

international- cinema in the beginning of the sixties.

Though the film handles a great subject and is graced by the appeal of Hitchcock as a character as seen in the fascinating archive material the film shows us, *7852/* is far from being a derivative work. The film draws huge part of its energy being first and foremost about obsession and true affection towards the medium of cinema, a film made by a film buff who truly understands the artistic struggle and the careful composition of empathy to the extent that we find ourselves deeply engaged to the journey of putting together a scene!

Mohamed El-Hajj



“17”: THE STRUGGLE OF FEMALE ATHLETES



In a moving opening sequence, we see a seemingly mundane event, one that recurs daily on the streets of most Arab cities, this time with a little twist. A bunch of young boys are playing football, and a girl is playing with them. Between the rich and poor houses of the Jordanian capital Amman, and among those who first played the game on the bright green grass of the playground and those who did on the streets, we are introduced to our story.

“17” is a film that follows the journey of the Jordanian national football team for girls through the 2016 FIFA U-17 Women’s World Cup. In other words, the journey of a team of girls playing a “masculine” game in a society where women are still struggling with sexism and a public morality sympathetic with honour crime.

“17” follows a traditional mode of narration. It starts with character introductions, then moves onto a second act that depicts the formation of the team, which becomes the protagonist from this moment on, then it ends with a record of the team’s matches in the group stage of the championship. Despite such a structure, however, “17” breaks free at times, discreetly alluding to some of the unspoken problems that lie beneath the shiny image expected of a girls’ football team in a country like Jordan. One of the girls mentions the constant attempts of Jordanian coaches to exclude her on the basis of an illness that never really prevented her from playing. Another girl’s testimony implies communication problems among the girls because of class differences, which leads to the emergence of a small group within the team that ends up influencing the decision on who gets the ball on the pitch.

The second act also exposes us to a striking paradox. In a film that tells the story of a girls’

football team, the most interesting character is male. Coach Robbie, the team manager, is a man lost amid the politics of being in such position, where the social and familial is invariably mixed in with the professional. In one scene, the coach is baffled when he finds himself in the middle of an unjustified drama after excluding some players from the team when deciding on the final lineup for the tournament. One of them argues with him, claiming that she plays better than some of the girls he selected, before her father pays him a visit as

well, contesting his decision, while her mother uses her connections to try and invalidate the decision through the National Football Federation. It is such incidents in particular that sustain the film; energy throughout its screen time.

“17” is the third documentary film by Wedad Shafakoj after “Last Rider” and “If You’re Meaning to Kill Me”, which was screened in the Karama Film Festival for Human Rights in Jordan.

Mohamed El-Hajj

