



MAY in the SUMMER

A Feature Film

Written & Directed by

CHERIEN DABIS

Producers

ALIX MADIGAN

CHERIEN DABIS

SABINE SIDAWI

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LOGLINE:

A dramatic comedy set in Jordan where ancient tradition, burgeoning modernity and Western imitation collide, *MAY IN THE SUMMER* follows the secrets, lies and loves of three Arab American sisters and their strong-willed, single mom.

SYNOPSIS:

MAY BRENNAN (31) lands in Amman where she's reunited with her mom NADINE (50) and younger sisters DALIA (26) and YASMINE (24). In the midst of planning her summer wedding, May has one slight problem: a devout Born-Again Christian, Nadine thoroughly disapproves of May's Muslim fiancé. Convinced that a mixed marriage is doomed, she plans to boycott the wedding. As if that's not bad enough, there's trouble in paradise. But May is too busy trying to prove her mother wrong to take her relationship troubles to heart.

Meanwhile, the three sisters make an effort to reconcile with their estranged father EDWARD (60), an American with business interests in the Middle East. Without telling their mother, they pay him a visit and meet his new wife NAJLA (42). Her warmth catches them off guard, and despite their resistance, they find themselves drawn to her.

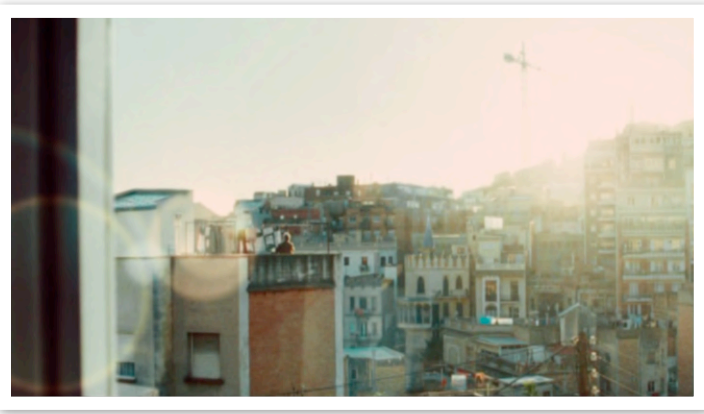
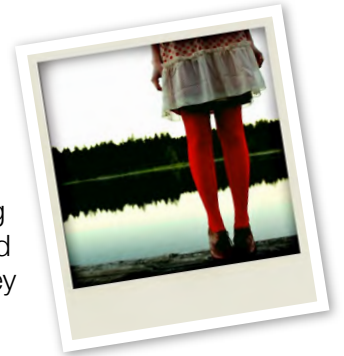
At the same time, Dalia and Yasmine decide to try to find their mom a new husband. Though Nadine at first plays along, encouraging her daughters to accompany her to Church to search for possible candidates, May starts to suspect that she might already have a special someone.

That's when Najla calls May, worried that Edward might be having an affair. Disappointed all over again, May confronts her father, determined to set him straight. Instead of a fight, she's met with an unexpected apology and relationship wisdom that leaves her even more uncertain of her own future.

Then Edward has a heart attack, which lands him in the hospital. At his bedside, Nadine and Najla jockey for who can take better care of him. That's when all secrets are revealed, and the family comes apart at the seams. Ultimately, May discovers that the only person she's been hiding from is herself. Surrendering to the inevitable and facing the reality of what she's lost, May discovers the freedom of letting go.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

At the center of the tangled family in *MAY IN THE SUMMER* is May, a free spirited, Palestinian American whose stubborn pride and fear of making herself vulnerable stand in her way of having honest relationships with the people closest to her. The central struggle is between she and her mother who must both learn to forego their masks of seeming perfection in order to see and accept one another for who they truly are – differences and all.



The visual style of the film will reflect its subject matter, which at its core is about letting go of layers of social and cultural pretense in order to surrender the truth and simply be who we are. To translate this onto the screen, I plan to shoot through objects and people, creating layers of physical obstruction before our characters, almost drowning them in their environment, family and personal dramas. Long lenses will highlight May's isolation from both her family and her surroundings. She should look as though she's suffocating. The camera will mirror her emotional state, which at first is controlled, aloof and restrained. As May unravels throughout the film, physical obstructions will be removed, allowing us to see more clearly. The camera will come alive with fluidity and movement. And the frame will loosen, giving May and everyone else room to breathe. In the end, as secrets are revealed and the truth surfaces, our characters' newfound personal freedoms will be reflected through the use of wider lenses.



The mostly dusty beige, naturally monochromatic city of Amman will provide the perfect backdrop for saturated color to pop when set against it, drawing our eye to what stands apart from the environment, what appears out of place. A sumptuous natural veneer will bathe the film in a warm golden aura. A soft focus, fleshy look will add a sensual, romantic elegance. It will be a deliberately lush style that gives the movie an aged, nostalgic appearance while highlighting the beauty of the Jordanian landscape. Slightly blowing out the daytime exteriors and embracing the lens flare will allow for the desert heat and bright sunlight to feature in the film, a force of oppression weighing our characters down.



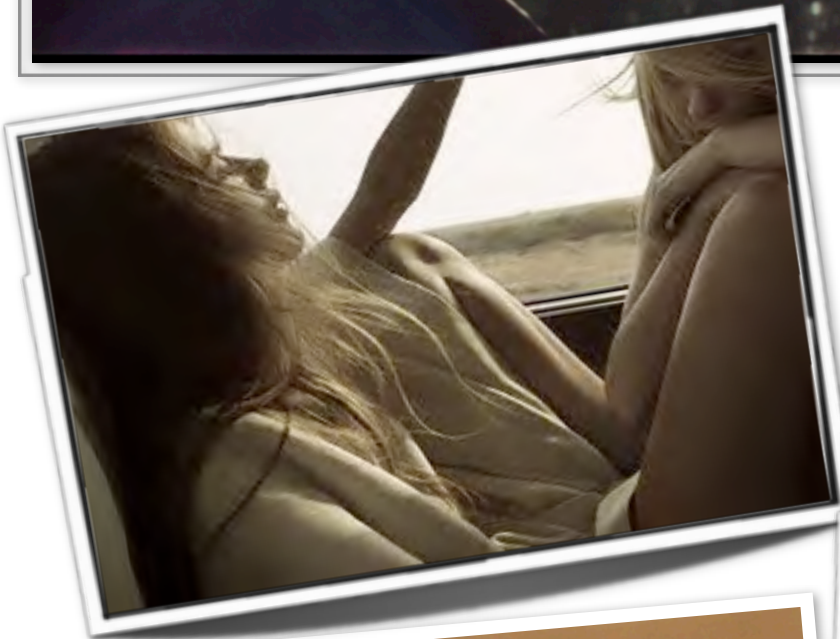
Visual Irony

The humor in *MAY IN THE SUMMER* is central to both its universality and poignancy. Through its use, I hope to gently push the audience into uncomfortable areas they had not anticipated in order for them to discover new things about themselves. With visual irony, I plan to highlight the often-humorous contradictions of life in the Arab world, especially Jordan where ancient civilization meets dotcom modernity and criticism of American foreign policy is superseded by imitation of Western culture.

In using such humor, shooting entirely on location in Jordan, casting authentically and allowing the narrative to organically unfold, I aim to create an entertaining yet moving portrait of a complex, modern family, one that turns stereotypes on their heads and presents an edgier side of the Middle East, a side rarely seen in world cinema.



MORE INSPIRATION



BUDGET / SALES / FINANCING / PRODUCTION NOTES

BUDGET: \$1,500,000 USD (*A budget top sheet is available upon request.*)

SALES: Wild Bunch/Elle Driver will represent world sales on MAY IN THE SUMMER.

FINANCING: We've secured the majority of our financing and are currently seeking the remaining 350K that we need to make the film. (*A finance plan is available upon request.*)

PRODUCTION NOTES: Principal photography for MAY IN THE SUMMER will take place in Amman, Jordan, where the film community has been extremely generous in their support of both Cherien and the film.

The Jordan Royal Film Commission will facilitate production of MAY IN THE SUMMER. In addition to granting the film their Jordanian Film Fund in the amount of \$57,000 USD, they will be paying mid-level crew salaries and providing free public locations and security on set as well as other valuable production services. Their support will allow for the production to utilize the most experienced Jordanian crew and services in return for the production providing crucial training and experience for the Jordanian film community.

Other Jordanian institutions sponsoring the film by providing generous in-kind donations include the Jordan Tourism Board and Royal Jordanian Airlines, which has agreed to provide free round trip airfare for all cast and crew coming from outside of Jordan.

Producers, director & cast are also working for reduced/deferred rates in support of the film.



DIRECTOR'S BIO:

Cherien Dabis



Cherien Dabis is an award-winning feature filmmaker who received her M.F.A. in film from Columbia University. She wrote, directed, produced and edited several short films including MAKE A WISH (2006), which premiered at the 2007 Sundance Film Festival, Berlin International Film Festival as well as Clermont-Ferrand where it won the Press Prize and Jury's Special Mention. The film went on to win 11 more top international awards. Dabis worked for three seasons as a writer and co-producer on Showtime's groundbreaking, original hit television series THE L WORD before going on to make her feature writing and directorial debut with AMREEKA.

AMREEKA (2009) world-premiered at the Sundance Film Festival (2009), opened New York's New Director's/New Films at the MoMA (2009) and won the prestigious FIPRESCI award in the Director's Fortnight at Cannes (2009). It was nominated for a Best Picture Gotham Award (2009), 3 Independent Spirit Awards (2010), including Best Picture and was named one of the Top Ten Independent Films of the Year by the National Board of Review (2009). The same year, Dabis was also named one of Variety's "Ten Directors to Watch." AMREEKA was released theatrically to worldwide critical acclaim and was chosen as one of only five American films to take part in the Sundance Institute's inaugural Film Forward: Advancing Cultural Dialogue initiative, an international cinematic cultural exchange and diplomacy program.

A USA Rockefeller Fellow (2010) and winner of the Humanitas Prize (2009) as well as the Adrienne Shelly Excellence in Filmmaking Award (2009), Dabis is an alumnus of the Sundance Screenwriter's Lab (2010, 2005), Film Independent Director's Lab (2005) and Tribeca All Access (2007), where she was honored with the first ever L'Oréal Paris Woman of Worth Vision Award. She was also appointed a New York Foundation for the Arts Artist Fellow in Playwriting / Screenwriting (2007) and has received a Renew Media / Tribeca Film Institute Media Artist Fellowship (2008). In support of her work, she has been awarded generous grants from National Geographic, the Jerome Foundation, the New York State Council on the Arts and the Sundance Institute.

This spring, Dabis is slated to go into production on her second feature film MAY IN THE SUMMER, for which she won a Time Warner Storytelling Grant (2010), Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art Grant (2010, 2009) as well as the prestigious Sundance / NHK International Filmmaker Award at the 2011 Sundance Film Festival. Additional projects she's writing and directing include a dramatic comedy for Fox Searchlight and an existential comedy with Producer Andrew Lazar. She is also participating in Salma Hayek's upcoming animated adaptation of Kahlil Gibran's THE PROPHET.

Dabis has been an advisor for the Sundance Screenwriter's Labs in both Turkey and Jordan and has taught screenwriting in the graduate film program at Columbia University. She currently splits her time between New York City and Amman.

KEY POINTS:

MAY IN THE SUMMER will take advantage of the following factors to position itself favorably in the independent film marketplace:

- Low/well managed production budget = lower risk and greater potential for upside. MAY IN THE SUMMER will take advantage of in-kind donations and support from Jordanian, American as well as international Institutions that will enable the production to shoot on location in Jordan and bring the world of the film to life with authenticity and high production value while keeping costs low.
- Strong producing team with exemplary record of success with similar films as well as a strong network of relationships within the sales and distribution community.
- Strong industry response from Cherien's prior feature film AMREEKA, which premiered at the 2009 Sundance Film Festival and was nominated for the Grand Jury Prize. Later that year, it had its international premiere at the Cannes Film Festival Director's Fortnight and won the FIPRESCI international critics prize. During its festival run, the film was received with glowing reviews at over 50 festivals at home and abroad. There is very strong awareness of Cherien's work in the international film community and much excitement surrounding her next film.
- Strong critical response to director's prior feature film. AMREEKA received overwhelmingly positive reviews from many of the nation's leading film critics. (A press summary and several reviews are attached to this packet.)
- Reputable actors already attached to the film, including HIAM ABBASS who will be playing the role of NADINE. Her previous credits include: THE VISITOR, AMREEKA, THE LEMON TREE, MUNICH, MIRAL, THE SYRIAN BRIDE and PARADISE NOW. And ALIA SHAWKAT who's attached to play the role of DALIA. Her credits include: ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT, CEDAR RAPIDS, AMREEKA, THE LEMON TREE, WHIP IT and THE RUNAWAYS.
- Strong network of institutional support. Cherien's voice and style, combined with her talent for storytelling that blends the line beautifully between art and access, has struck a chord not only with audiences but with institutional support in the film industry. MAY IN THE SUMMER is being made with the utmost support from The Sundance Institute, Film Independent, The Doha Film Institute, The Tribeca Film Institute, among many others.

TIMELINE

MAY IN THE SUMMER will take advantage of a late spring / early summer shoot in order to be ready for submission to the 2013 Sundance Film Festival, which would be the first opportunity for investors to recoup, approximately 8 months after cash flow.

- April/May 2012 - Close financing, begin prep
- June 2012 - Begin principle photography (5 weeks)
- July/August/September 2012 - Editorial (12 weeks)
- October 2012 - Sundance Submission (late deadline)
- October/November/December 2012 - Post Production
- January 2013 - Sundance Premiere (assuming acceptance)
- May 2013 - Final Delivery



THE PRODUCTION TEAM:

Alix Madigan-Yorkin - Producer

Alix Madigan-Yorkin produced *WINTER'S BONE*, directed by Debra Granik, the winner of the Grand Jury Prize for best dramatic feature at the Sundance Film Festival in 2010 and nominated for four Academy Awards including Best Picture. She has served in various producing capacities on the cult comedy *SMILEY FACE*, directed by Gregg Araki and starring Anna Faris, *MARRIED LIFE*, directed by Ira Sachs and starring Rachel McAdams, Pierce Brosnan, Chris Cooper and Patricia Clarkson, *CLEANER*, directed by Renny Harlin, starring Samuel L. Jackson and Ed Harris, Neil LaBute's *YOUR FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS*, starring Ben Stiller, Natassja Kinski, Amy Brenneman, and Jason Patric and *CASE 39*, directed by Christian Alvert, starring Renee Zellweger. She also produced *SUNDAY*, which won The Grand Jury Prize for best dramatic feature and the Waldo Salt Screenwriting Award in the 1997 Sundance Film Festival, directed by Jonathan Nossiter. Most recently, Alix wrapped *IMOGENE* starring Kristen Wiig, Annette Bening and Darren Criss and directed by Shari Berman and Bob Pulcini.

Currently, Alix is a staff producer for Anonymous Content, a multimedia company based in Los Angeles that produced *BABEL*, *ETERNAL SUNSHINE OF THE SPOTLESS MIND*, *FIFTY FIRST DATES* and the landmark BMW commercials. She has worked at various companies before her current job at Anonymous Content, including Propaganda Films, Skouras Pictures and Avenue Entertainment.

Christopher Tricarico - Executive Producer / Production Legal

Christopher Tricarico is a founding partner of Tricarico Chavez LLP, a full service law firm concentrating in the entertainment and media industries. He represents individual and institutional clients in various transactions in connection with all aspects of the development, production, financing, and distribution of motion pictures, television programming, music videos, video games, music, animation, publishing and other entertainment content. His clients range from independent production companies, producers, writers, rights holders to major studios and include Anonymous Content, Scott Free Productions, The Estate of Philip K. Dick and The Walt Disney Company. He has worked in the independent film world for more than 20 years, and currently serves as a legal advisor to the Sundance Film Institute.

Mr. Tricarico received a Bachelor of Arts degree in English and Journalism from the University of Southern California in 1987, a master's degree in Journalism from Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism in 1990, and his law degree from the University of Pennsylvania in 1991. He is admitted to practice in California and a member of the State Bar of California. Mr. Tricarico has been an arbitrator and member of the Independent Film & Television Alliance, and has written extensively about licensing, merchandising and music issues and the law.

Sabine Sidawi - Co Producer / Line Producer

Sabine Sidawi is head of Orjouane Productions, a Beirut-based production company created in 2007. Managing all aspects of production, Sabine has overseen films shot throughout the region, including Lebanon, Jordan and Syria. Her past credits as line producer, executive producer and co-producer include Dima El Horr's *EVERYDAY IS A HOLIDAY*, Maher Abi Samra's *WE WERE COMMUNIST*, Danielle Arbid's *BEYROUTH HOTEL*, *The LOST MAN* and *IN THE BATTLEFIELDS*, Josef Fares' *ZOZO* and Olivier Assayas' *CARLOS*.

AMREEKA

written and directed by Cherien Dabis



Los Angeles Times / Kenneth Turan

"Amreeka," beautifully written and directed by Cherien Dabis, stars the irresistible Nisreen Faour " Made with a keen eye and a light touch, "Amreeka" excels at finding the warmth and humanity in a difficult situation."

Hollywood Reporter / Kirk Honeycutt

"Amreeka" lives up to its positive pre-Sundance buzz."

Screen International / Mike Goodridge

"Loved the film. The lead actress was wonderful"

Park Record / Greg Marshall

"What distinguishes the film from others is its sense of humor."

LA Weekly / Scott Foundas

"A lovely surprise. Tells its story from the inside-out, without want or need of a white protagonist to serve as the audience's surrogate, and with real three-dimensional characters. The details in the film feel lived-in and sincere. Dabis keeps the film's tone buoyant and light, making a fine comedy. Dabis, makes us laugh at ourselves and, in turn, each other. Amreeka was the best of several films at Sundance this year"

Vogue / Danielle Nussbaum

"One of my favorite movies at the fest!"

New York Magazine / Logan Hill

"Nisreen is one of the actors to watch! She broke our hearts when her optimism hit the hard wall of American reality."

Jewish Journal / Larry Mark

"With humor, nostalgia, sadness, and authenticity, Dabis creates an absorbing story of immigration and struggle"

NPR / The National AE / David D'Arcy

"Amazing! One of the best films of the fest!"

Backstage / Sarah Kuhn

"I thought it was lovely. Nicely cast, touching but not maudlin. Good debut film!"

Canal Plus / Didier Allouch

"Where has this story been hiding? We have been waiting for a wonderful movie like this for a long time. Nisreen is wonderful"

Creative Screenwriting / Jeff Goldsmith

"A solid immigrant tale. The performances were solid and it certainly made me hungry for White Castle. The audience I saw it with certainly enjoyed it as the film played quite well!"

Daily Variety / Rob Davis

"Leavened with vibrant energy". "Enormously appealing turn by earthy Nisreen Faour in the lead role of Muna"

"Kudos and a Stateside pickup seem likely". "Faour's irresistible turn as Muna, acting is strong and believable"

Entertainment Weekly / Lisa Schwarzbaum

"...there's an authenticity to Amreeka that can't be faked, an artless purity especially in the winning performance of Nisreen Faour as the unsinkable Muna, and a bright warmth of storytelling that announces the filmmaker as a talent to watch."

"The film is terrific. Amreeka is a heartfelt triumph!" The cast is uniformly wonderful!"

Hollywood Reporter / Jay A. Fernandez

"Sundance audiences were on their feet, pounding out applause. The pics prospects are good and packs a mainstream emotional punch."

Indie Wire / Erik Kohn

"Dabis remains spot on when focusing on Muna's attempts to interact with other cultures. A provocative parallel.."

Interview / Rebecca Sims

"I loved it! I loved it! I loved it! The movie blew me away!"

Los Angeles Times Feature / Kenneth Turan

"Though "Amreeka" is serious, it is funny and playful as well." "The strength of "Amreeka" is its ability to take on a fraught situation and avoid both stridency and sentimentality, an elegant balancing act"

Salt Lake City Weekly / Scott Renshaw

"Intriguing point of view. Nisreen Faour delivers a rich performance"

UK Guardian / Ben Child

"Striking timing"



AMREEKA

A FILM BY CHERIEN DABIS



NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

www.AMREEKA.com ENTERTAINMENT

The New York Times

SETTLERS FROM AFAR, IN LAND OF LINCOLN

by Stephen Holden

Cherien Dabis's "Amreeka" (the Arabic word for America) stands alongside "The Visitor" and "Maria Full of Grace" as one of the most accomplished recent films about a non-European immigrant coming to the United States. While the arrivals in the other two movies were not legal immigrants, the indomitably good-natured protagonist of "Amreeka," Muna Farah (Nisreen Faour), is a divorced non-Muslim Palestinian woman with a green card.

"Amreeka," which is set in 2003 at the outset of the American-led invasion of Iraq, is inspired by the experiences of Ms. Dabis, a Palestinian-Jordanian who grew up in Ohio and in Jordan and whose parents immigrated to the United States just before she was

born. During the Persian Gulf war, she recalls in the production notes, her family faced the same kinds of persecution and ostracism that Muna and her sister's family, the Halabys, suffer as the invasion continues.

The early scenes in the West Bank show Muna stoically enduring the daily humiliation of having to pass through two Israeli checkpoints on her grueling commute from Bethlehem to work in a bank. For all the hardships of life in the West Bank, in coming to America, she is forsaking a relatively comfortable existence to venture into the unknown with her 16-year-old son, Fadi (Melkar Muallem).

At the Chicago airport, where they are detained for three hours, mother and son endure the same sort of hostile interrogation they received at West Bank checkpoints. After finally passing through immigration, they are met by Muna's severe sister, Raghda Halaby (Hiam Abbass), and her family, who live in a semi-rural suburb.

Raghda, who left the West Bank 15 years earlier but is still profoundly homesick, is married to a successful Palestinian doctor, Nabeel (Yussef Abu Warda). The couple have three daughters, the oldest of whom, Salma (Alia Shawkat), is Fadi's age and becomes his guide to the treacherous jungle of American high school life. Horrified at Fadi's pleated trousers, because they make him look "F.O.B." ("fresh off the boat," she explains), she supervises his wardrobe for his first day of school, and the two become fellow rebels from the social mainstream.

Muna's first major setback is her discovery while unpacking that the sealed tin of cookies in which she had stashed all her money is missing, having been confiscated by the immigration authorities, along with the other food she had brought. Deeply ashamed, she is too proud to tell her sister.

Unlike other recent films about immigration, "Amreeka" maintains the buoyant mood of a serious sitcom. As Muna and Fadi confront hostility and prejudice, their misadventures, some of which augur disaster, are resolved without too much grief. The movie is peppered with little jokes. Scrutinizing the cover of a supermarket tabloid, Muna asks, "What does adopting an orangutan love child mean?" A roadside sign with missing letters advises, "Support our oops."

The film's upbeat tone reflects the resilience and sunny temperament of Muna, who as embodied by Ms. Faour is the kind of warm, lovable woman you want to hug. Desperate for work and unable to find it at a local bank, Muna takes a job at a White Castle next door but pretends to her family that the bank is her workplace.

At school, Fadi encounters ethnic slurs and bullying, and in the most serious incident is arrested after retaliating. At the same time, rising anti-Arab sentiment decimates Nabeel's medical practice and strains the Halabys' marriage. As his practice evaporates, Ms. Abbass, the great Palestinian actress who also appeared in "The Visitor," imbues Raghda with a heavy weight of sorrow and anxiety.

Through it all, Muna perseveres. For every hostile person she encounters, there is a good Samaritan. Her co-workers at White Castle are understanding when she makes mistakes. Her most helpful ally is Mr. Novatski (Joseph Ziegler), the divorced Polish-Jewish principal at Fadi's school, who comes to his rescue at a crucial turning point.

If, at moments, the film's positive outlook verges on naïveté, it never strays over separating the possible from the preposterous. "Amreeka" believes in people, and its faith rubs off on you.



AMREEKA

A FILM BY CHERIEN DABIS RELEASING SEPTEMBER 2009 www.AMREEKA.com



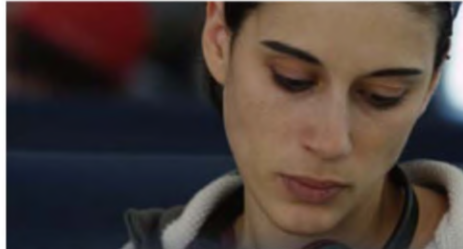
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FILM REVIEWS

Film Review: Amreeka

By Kirk Honeycutt, January 17, 2009 08:25 ET



Bottom Line: A heartfelt, fully realized comic drama about Palestinian immigrants in the American heartland.

[More Sundance reviews](#)

PARK CITY -- Cherien Dabis' "Amreeka" lives up to its positive pre-Sundance buzz. The film is terrific, especially since American immigrant stories like "Amreeka" have been playing in Park City for years. Dabis, a Palestinian-American, has thoroughly re-energized the genre

with refreshing wit, honest emotions, incisive observations and a perfect cast she literally flew around the world to find. What's more, this is a thoroughly professional indie film; no allowances need be made for rough production values or budgetary shortcomings.

"Amreeka" -- Arabic for America -- is a festival director's dream, but it obviously will have an uphill struggle in theatrical distribution. Critical acclaim and fest honors could pave the way for it to become a modest indie hit. If nothing else, Dabis, in her first feature, gets immediately added to that impressive list of Sundance discoveries.

What adds poignancy, to say nothing of dramatic heft, to this immigrant story is that it concerns a Palestinian mother and her teenage son, who leave their Israeli-occupied homeland for Illinois just as American forces invade Iraq. Few immigrants have been greeted with such fear and animosity as American "patriots" fail to distinguish between different Arab groups or to realize this family isn't even Muslim.

When Muna Farah (stage actress and director Nisreen Faour) gets a U.S. Green Card in the mail, she is shocked. She had forgotten she applied for it back in the days when she was still married. Her son Fadi (Melkar Muallem), whose educational and job opportunities are so limited in the Palestinian territories, is overjoyed. He can't wait to flee his home.

The two fly to the American heartland where her sister Raghda (veteran actress Hiam Abbass) and her doctor husband Nabeel (Yussef Abu-Warda) live in a small town. Muna loses all her money in a misfortune at the airport, then finds bank work impossible to find despite her experience and degrees. Meanwhile, Nabeel's practice has all but vanished with the Iraq invasion.

The film does deal with the setbacks these two FOBs -- fresh off the boats -- suffer, but Dabis shows the other side to the American Dream with a rich sense of humor. Small cultural misunderstandings, the vital importance of clothes and attitude to get through high school and rousing family quarrels all trigger big laughs.

In this way, Dabis subtly shifts the tale away from victimhood to one of human nature finding unexpected ways to triumph under pressure. She nails the universal in every single instance. She catches people with their pants down whether it has to do with the doctor's unhealthy obsession with the nightly news or the mother's obsession with weight loss, having lost her husband to a skinny woman.

The cast is uniformly wonderful, but let's single out the two leads especially. Faour, working for the first time partially in English, delivers an empathetic portrait of a woman who is far braver than she realizes and who startles even herself when she learns just what kind of pride and feelings of self-worth are necessary to survive in a new world. Muallem, all of 16, beautifully captures the vacillation of a newcomer who wants to embrace a new life but is torn by homesickness and displacement.

Tobias Datum gives the hand-held cinematography different looks for Ramallah -- warm but sun-blasted -- and for the U.S. (where Winnipeg actually plays the Illinois town) -- overcast and a tad monotonous with lots of artificial lighting. Kareem Roustom's Middle Eastern-flavored score contributes greatly.

Production companies: First Generation Films, Buffalo Gal Pictures, Eagle Vision Media Group, Cinergy Prods.

Cast: Nisreen Faour, Melkar Muallem, Hiam Abbass, Alia Shawkat, Yussuf Abu-Warda, Joseph Ziegler

Director-screenwriter: Cherien Dabis

Producers: Christina Piovesan, Paul Barkin

Executive producer: Alicia Sams, Cherien Dabis

Director of photography: Tobias Datum

Production designer: Aidan Leroux

Music: Kareem Roustom

Costume designer: Patricia J. Henderson

Editor: Keith Reamer

No rating, 96 minutes

10 Directors to Watch

Posted: Wed., Jan. 14, 2009, 12:45pm PT

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Cherien Dabis

'Amreeka' unveils Arab-American life

By ALI JAAFAR

Arab-American helmer Cherien Dabis' life and career often has been shaped by events outside of her control.

Born in Omaha, Neb., to first-generation immigrant Palestinian and Jordanian parents, Dabis witnessed up close the vilification of Arabs in some U.S. media circles after the outbreak of the first Gulf War in 1991.

That experience, coupled with the backlash her own family faced in rural Ohio as her physician father lost his patients and her 15-year-old sister was investigated for allegedly threatening to kill the U.S. president, pushed her toward a career in the arts.



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"I saw the way the media was stereotyping Arabs and I decided I wanted to have a hand in changing that," Dabis says. "Ten years later I enrolled at Columbia University to study filmmaking. I have a foot in both the Mideast and the Midwest. It gives me a unique perspective."

Dabis found herself in New York only days before the 9/11 attacks. The tragic events of that day had a huge influence on her student work, as did the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq.

Now Dabis finds her first full-length feature "Amreeka" -- a gritty dramedy about a struggling Palestinian single mother who escapes life in Ramallah to immigrate to America -- bowing in competition at Sundance in the wake of Israel's military campaign against Palestinian militant organization Hamas.

"It was like history repeating itself," Dabis says. "Palestinians need to be humanized. There is an urgent need for that. 'Amreeka' is as much a mother-son story as it is about life under occupation. I want to show the universality of an average Palestinian family. The film is also about hope, and we need that right now more than ever."

Dabis raised the pic's seven-figure budget from a variety of private sources in the U.S. and brought onboard two of the Arab world's biggest media orgs, pay TV net Showtime Arabia and Prince Waleed bin Talal's multimedia titan Rotana.

"We believe that this story will help in bridging some of the misunderstandings between the Middle East and the Western world," says Showtime Arabia chief Marc-Antoine d'Halluin. "From our perspective, this is where cinema plays its most noble and essential role."

Age: 32

Home base: New York

Inspired by: Mike Leigh, John Cassavetes and Robert Altman; favorite pics include "The 400 Blows," "The Bicycle Thief," "Ali: Fear Eats the Soul," "A Woman Under the Influence," "Working Girl," "Midnight Cowboy" and "In the Mood for Love."

Rep: Attorney: Jodi Peikoff, Peikoff Law Office

Contact the Variety newsroom at news@variety.com

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Peter Straughan
Writing – Adapted Screenplay (*Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*)

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Tales of the Golden Age
Cinq légendes urbaines pour raconter la dictature Ceaucescu. Parce qu'il faut bien en rire.

PAGE 25

Etreintes brisées
Variation en miroir d'Almodóvar sur son cinéma et sur sa star, Penélope Cruz.

Huppert a l'œil
PAGE 30
La présidente du jury nous livre sa photo quotidienne.

CANNES

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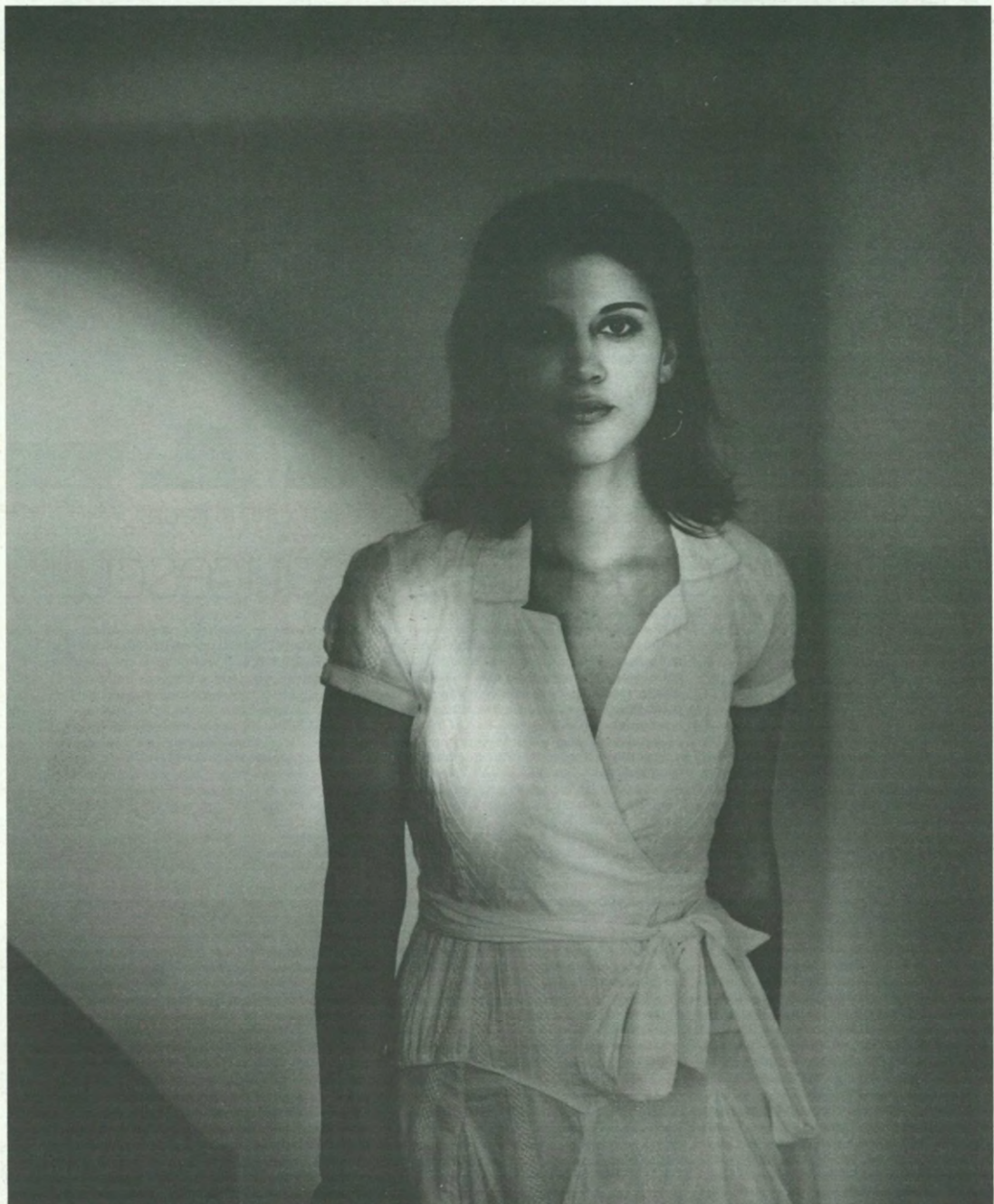


La vie accrédite

Black-out

«Tiens, c'est quoi tous ces camions de CRS?» pouvait-on se demander en arpentant la Croisette, mardi matin. La réponse tombera quelques instants plus tard, vers 15 heures, sous la forme catégorique d'une coupure d'électricité: toutes ces forces de l'ordre, dont le Festival de Cannes, même en temps normal, n'est jamais dépourvu, prenaient place en vue de la manifestation des agents d'EDF, de GDF et des salariés de leurs filiales de distribution. Soyons beau joueur, malgré la légère panique qui nous a aussi saisis: c'était très bien visé. Les insurgés pouvaient être sûrs que l'effet d'un black-out en pleine foire cannoise allait être spectaculaire. La projection du film événement de la Quinzaine, *I Love You Philip Morris*, présenté par Jim Carrey lui-même, a ainsi été interrompue. Les salles de presse du Palais, encore alimenté, se retrouvaient soudainement bondées de tous les journalistes dont les bureaux, chambres d'hôtels ou appartements étaient sans électricité. La leçon est limpide: à l'heure d'Internet, du wifi et de toutes ces belles choses, les circuits de l'information ont tôt fait de s'écrouler comme château de cartes dès qu'on leur coupe le jus. Moins grave, et même plus amusant: les palaces sans groupe électrogène ont trinqué eux aussi. Palais Stéphanie, Eden Rock, Gray d'Albion: ces trois-là au moins ont été dans le schwarz et on imagine avec une certaine délectation l'embarras des réceptions devant expliquer à leurs clients du monde entier que, euh, oui, en France, parfois... La manif a été fermement canalisée rue d'Antibes et son accès au Palais empêché, mais comment se prémunir d'une coupure «sauvage»? On ne peut pas. Et si on a pu s'agacer sur le coup, la révélation de cette faille, aux yeux de tous, au cœur même du plus grand festival du monde, mériterait presque d'être récompensée. En petites coupures?

OLIVIER SÉGURET



Cherien Dabis, réalisatrice d'*Amreeka*, présenté à la Quinzaine (lire pages 27 et 29).

PAR PATRICK SWIRC



mercredi 20 et jeudi 21 mai 2009

Amerrika

de Cherien Dabis

avec Nisreen Faour et Hiam Abbass

Cannes 27

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Départ ♦ Une variation poétique sur l'exil et une première réussie pour Cherien Dabis.

Fortune d'«Amreeka»

QUINZAINE DES RÉALISATEURS
Amreeka
de Cherien Dabis
avec Alia Shawkat, Hiam Abbass,
Melkar Muallem, Joseph Ziegler...
1 h 36. Sortie française le 17 juin.

Voilà le genre de micmac qu'on adore: *Amreeka*, premier film de Cherien Dabis, Américaine d'origine jordano-palestinienne, a été tourné entre les territoires occupés de Cisjordanie et l'Illinois profond tandis que sa nationalité (en tant que production) se partage entre Canada, Koweït et Etats-Unis. Il est presque superflu d'ajouter qu'*Amreeka* est évidemment un film sur l'exil... **Guerre** Mais c'est loin de n'être que cela. C'est d'abord l'histoire d'une mère et de son fils: Mouna, la quarantaine active, divorcée, potelée à l'orientale (merveilleuse Alia Shawkat) et

Fadi, 16 ans, ado sobre et intelligent (excellent Melkar Muallem). Une énorme lassitude, alimentée par la difficulté de l'existence dans les territoires occupés (misère, mur de la honte, contrôles permanents) les décide, sans enthousiasme, au grand départ. Ils rejoignent une partie de leur famille installée du côté de Chicago, où commence pour l'un et l'autre un rude apprentissage de la vie à l'occidentale. D'autant que nous sommes aux premiers jours de la seconde guerre d'Irak, menée par Bush fils dans un climat qui, aux Etats-Unis, n'a jamais été si défavorable aux Arabes. La caméra de Cherien Dabis développe une proximité tout à fait exceptionnelle avec ses personnages, offrant à chaque instant de très vrais et beaux moments de cinéma. Un plan furtif où Fadi entre par mégarde dans la chambre de sa mère qui se rhabille, un autre



Alia Shawkat, merveilleuse, est Mouna, soucieuse. PHOTO DR

du même jeune homme à l'arrière d'une voiture sur laquelle tombe la pluie, un troisième ou Mouna, dans son lit, lutte contre l'angoisse qui lui monte à la gorge: trois signatures, parmi tant d'autres, qui confirment la naissance d'une cinéaste déjà accomplie, avec un style, une vision et un axe, fut-il baladeur. «Minorité ici, minorité là-bas» sera à peu près la seule réplique didactique, et presque surplignée au Stabilo, d'un film où les dialogues transmettent au contraire avec délicatesse les affres de l'expatriation. De nombreuses autres pistes

poétiques s'élancent néanmoins autour des personnages, notamment dans les décors, tous naturels mais constellés de signes qui ne le sont peut-être pas: des slogans, des tags, des affiches chargés de mots trop signifiants pour être accidentels tapissent souvent les recoins de l'écran. Dans le fast-food où Mouna,

banquière expérimentée, décroche un job, on peut par exemple lire «Hamburgers. God bless America». Mais la Palestine n'est pas vierge, non plus, de ces messages subliminaux. **Fous d'espoir.** D'une grande inspiration mélancolique, *Amreeka* est aussi un petit exploit humain: ici, un discret jeu de regards entre Mouna et

un prof juif du lycée de Fadi suffit à déclencher des battements fous d'espoir (oh oui, pourvu qu'ils s'aiment!); là, un simple repas en famille peut déchaîner des rivières de larmes. Bienvenue à Cherien Dabis au pays consolateur qu'elle s'est enfin trouvée: le cinéma.

♦ OLIVIER SÉGURET
(Lire aussi page 29)