

Toronto Palestine Film Festival

September 26-October 2, 2009
102A-1075 Bay St., Ste 148
Toronto, ON M5S 2B2



PRESS RELEASE - For Immediate Release

September 27, 2009

Toronto Palestine Film Festival's Opening Film Thrills Audience

Toronto – More than 900 people turned up for the second annual Toronto Palestine Film Festival (TPFF) at the Bloor Cinema last night. Enthusiastic crowds came to see the Canadian premiere of the internationally acclaimed comedy-drama **Amreeka**, written and directed by Palestinian-American Cherien Dabis. The film tells the story of a single mother who leaves Ramallah for the US to provide her teenage son a better future.



Rafeef Ziadah, festival coordinator, welcomed the sold-out theatre by thanking them for their tremendous support and making the opening night a huge success. She told the audience that “we started planning TPFF09 as bombs were being dropped on Gaza so we decided to shine a spotlight on Gaza with our films.”

Following the screening, the film's Canadian producers Christina Piovesan and Paul Barkin, assistant director Markian Saray, and the film's youngest actress, Jenna Kavar, participated in a lively question and answer discussion with members of audience. Piovesan said the film was more than seven years in the making and reflected the director's childhood experience growing up in the US during the Iraq war. When asked whether they preferred filming in Ramallah or Manitoba, Piovesan responded by saying they had a great experience filming in Ramallah and really enjoyed working with the Palestinian crew on the film; whereas it “snowed in May in Manitoba.”

Invited guests celebrated the successful opening at a gala reception held at the Butler's Pantry after the film. Guests included members of the Arab community, co-presenters, sponsors, filmmakers, and a number of prominent Torontonians. Dania Majid, festival organizer and media liaison, acknowledged the dedication and incredible work of the volunteer-based TPFF organizing committee in creating a programme that features 34 films, an art exhibit, a film food brunch and three discussion forums. Majid explained that “TPFF believes it plays an important role as a Palestinian cultural institution by bringing the best of Palestinian art and culture to Toronto.”

The festival continues through the week with 10 Canadian premieres and three North American premieres. On September 27, 2009, TPFF starts the day with the sold-out **SAHTAIN! Film & Food Brunch**, where participants will enjoy two food-themed short films and a traditional Palestinian brunch prepared by Isam Kaisi, chef and owner of 93 Harbord. In the afternoon, TPFF will feature two films by the masters of Palestinian cinema – **Tale of Three Jewels**, by Michel Kleifi and **Rana's Wedding** by Hany Abu-Assad. ###

www.tpff.ca

email: media@tpff.ca

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FESTIVAL BACKGROUNDER

For more information on TPF or to schedule interviews with the directors please review the **TPFF 2009 Media Kit** available online at www.tpff.ca/media.htm or contact media@tpff.ca or 1-647-865-4090.

Laila's Birthday

Rashid Masharawi - Fiction - 2008 - Palestine/Tunisia/The Netherlands - 71min

Abu Laila is a judge turned taxi driver who must purchase a cake and present for his daughter Laila's birthday. This becomes an epic task as Abu Laila navigates the chaos of daily life in Ramallah. The film is a revealing and humorous portrait of a city and decent man at the breaking point.

Official Selection Toronto International Film Festival 2008

Checkpoint Rock: Songs of Palestine

Javier Corcuera, Fermin Muguruza - Documentary - 2009 - Spain - 70 min - North American Premiere

Checkpoint Rock shines a spotlight on music in Palestine. Beginning with renowned musician Marcel Khalife at Mahmoud Darwish's funeral, the film traverses Palestine/Israel and presents a diverse range of musical performances along the way.

Road Movie

Elle Flanders + Tamira Sawatzky - Multi-Media Installation - 2009 - Canada - Director in Attendance

TPFF is proud to preview a selection of segments from Road Movie, the epic twelve-screen multi-media installation by Elle Flanders and Tamira Sawatzky. Continuing their work on landscape and its relationship to shifting political geographies, each segment traces a single journey on Palestinian or 'Jewish only' roads – all shot in stop-motion animation in single takes. One segment of Road Movie will premiere before individual programs throughout the Festival.

SAHTAIN! Film & Food Brunch

Sunday Sept 27, 11:00-1:00 pm

93 HARBORD, 93 Harbord Street, Toronto

Traditional Palestinian brunch with talk and demo by acclaimed chef Isam Kaisi. Screening two food-themed short films.

Missing Gaza

Sobhi Al Zobaidi

Documentary - 2005 - Palestine/Israel - 13 min

A group of friends, originally from Gaza but unable to return because of the siege, meet for lunch in Ramallah. Over a traditional meal of molokheya, their lunchtime discussion is inter-cut with footage from Gaza of their friends, families and homes.

Daggit Gazza

Hadeel Assali / Iman Saqr

Documentary – 2009 – US – 8 min

Politics, food, and family are the topics of a phone conversation between Houston and Gaza that serves as voice-over commentary to the preparation of a spicy tomato salad.

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ART EXHIBIT '09

Jewels in the Machine: New Media Works at TPF

Sept 28 - Oct 3, 12:00pm - 7:00pm
Beaver Hall Gallery, 29 McCaul St., Toronto
Exhibit Opening: Tuesday Sept 29, 5:00pm - 7:00pm
Exhibit Curator: Reena Katz Contact: jewelsinthemachine@tpff.ca

Artists and Works:

Jamelie Hassan – London, ON
The Oblivion Seekers, 1985 (*2009 DVD format premier of film-installation work*)
John Kameel Farah – Toronto, ON
New Piano Composition (*TPFF Commission*)
Project Hope – Nablus, Palestine
The West Bank: A Collection of Graphic Novels (*Cells from upcoming book*)
Sandi Hilal + Alessandro Petti – London, UK + Bethlehem, Palestine
Decolonizing Architecture (*Silent Projections*)
Jumana Manna – Oslo, Norway + Jerusalem
Familiar + Ramallah Computer Game (*Video Works*)

FORUMS '09

Not Your Harem Girl: Cinema and Stereotypes
Monday Sept 28, 4:00-6:00 pm
William Doo Auditorium, 45 Willcocks Street, Toronto
Panellists: Dana Olwan, Nahed Mansour, Natalie Kouri-Towe

As this year's festival theme is "non-stereotypical cinema," this panel will look at the history of stereotypical representations of Arabs in film, particularly Arab woman. The panel will also discuss how young Arab artists are subverting these stereotypes through filmmaking and literature.

Cinema Politica: Film and the Art of Resistance
Wednesday Sept 30, 3:30-5:30 pm
Beaver Hall Gallery, 29 McCaul Street, Toronto
Panellists: Vicky Moufawad-Paul, Ali Kazimi, John Hupfield

Three documentary filmmakers who use filmmaking to tell unheard stories will discuss their art together. The evening will include a screening of shorts by Vicky Moufawad-Paul, Programming/Exhibition Coordinator of A Space Gallery, and John Hupfield from 7th Generation Image Makers, an arts and mural program for Native youth in Toronto.

Steel for the Spirit: Palestinian Cultural Production Today
Friday Oct 2, 3:30-5:30 pm
Beaver Hall Gallery, 29 McCaul Street, Toronto
Panellists: Sobhi al-Zobaidi, Rafeef Ziadah, Yafa Jarrar

The closing panel features three emerging Palestinian artists discussing what drives Palestinian cultural production today. The panellists will examine art forms ranging from spoken word to satiric filmmaking to *dabke* (Palestinian folk dancing), and how each is used to tell the stories of the Palestinian people.

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