

THE RED SEA INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL UNVEILS THE LINEUP FOR ITS FIRST EDITION

Lineup includes 138 standout, original and compelling films from 67 countries alongside a wave of Saudi films from talent shaping the Kingdom's filmmaking culture

*The First Edition will open with **Cyrano** directed by Joe Wright and close with **Bara El Manhag** directed by Amr Salama*

Jeddah, Saudi Arabia – 09 November 2021:

The Red Sea International Film Festival (RSIFF) in partnership with VOX Cinemas, MBC GROUP and Saudia Airlines today unveiled the programme for its first edition, which will run from 6-15 December in Jeddah's UNESCO World Heritage Site old-town (Al Balad), nestled on the eastern shore of the Red Sea. The Festival will welcome filmmakers, talent, media, industry professionals, and film fans for a 10-days celebration of global cinema.

The Festival is thrilled to announce that **Cyrano**, a musical romantic drama directed by award-winning British director Joe Wright and written by Erica Schmidt, based on Schmidt's 2018 stage musical of the same name, will raise the curtain on the first edition. The beautiful re-imagining of the timeless tale stars four-time Emmy-winning *Game of Thrones* star Peter Dinklage, Hayley Bennett, Kelvin Harrison Jr. and Ben Mendelsohn.

The inaugural edition will close with the World Premiere of acclaimed Egyptian director Amr Salama's **Bara El Manhag**. The light-hearted drama features stellar performances from powerhouse talent including Maged El-Kidwani, Omar Chareef, Rubi and Deena Maher.

Mohammed Al-Turki, RedSeaIFF's Chairman of the Committee said: "This is truly a landmark moment as we launch our first international Film Festival to celebrate original cinematic voices and showcase an extensive selection of films from around the world to local, regional and international audiences. The Festival will also serve as a launchpad for young Saudi and Arab talent, support the development of our flourishing industry, introduce international Festival guests to our vibrant creative scene and bring together the global film industry

to network, share knowledge and forge partnerships. We look forward to welcoming everyone to Jeddah for a packed programme of screenings, events and much more.”

The programme will feature 138 feature films and shorts from 67 countries in 34 languages from both established and emerging talent and will host 25 World Premieres, 48 Arab Premieres and 17 GCC Premieres, with a number of filmmakers and actors in attendance for many of the films.

The slate of new Saudi films will be shown alongside the best of new international cinema, featuring 27 new films from an exciting wave of Saudi filmmakers. The lineup of features and shorts will open a window for international guests to explore all aspects of Saudi society, and in turn, provide a vital platform for Saudi filmmakers to present their work on the big screen to the global film industry and local audiences.

Alongside the Red Sea Competition, Red Carpet Galas and Special Presentations, the Festival will host a range of cinema in the following sections: Festival Favourites, New Saudi/New Cinema, Red Sea Treasures, Red Sea Arab and International Spectacular, Red Sea Next Generation, Red Sea Immersive and Red Sea Episodic.

The Arab and international competition will showcase the highest creative achievements from an array of filmmakers in its Red Sea Feature and Shorts Competition sections. The lineup of 18 shorts and 16 features showcases the most compelling, unique and impressive work produced in the past year. Winners in each competition will be selected by esteemed juries and announced on 13 December.

Edouard Waintrop, Artistic Director of the RedSeaIFF, said: “We are delighted to announce the incredible slate of films being presented at the inaugural edition of the Festival. To be able to start so strongly, with such a wide array of incredible storytelling from both the Arab world and further afield, is significant and speaks to the promising future of this Festival, both this year and beyond. The slate also underscores the diversity of cinema being presented at the Festival, with authentic stories from all over the world coming from both established and emerging filmmakers.”

The Festival will be celebrating women and will honour two outstanding talents to salute their extraordinary contribution to cinema and continue the Festival’s mission to celebrate incredible women in film. From Saudi Arabia, the Festival will honour **Haifaa Al-Mansour**, the first female Saudi filmmaker, who has helped boost the women’s empowerment movement across the region and is one of the most significant figures in the Saudi film industry. Her feature debut, *Wadjda*, was the first film to ever be shot in the Kingdom and was nominated for numerous international awards, including a BAFTA Award for Best Film Not in the English Language. She has since gone on to direct films and TV shows internationally and remains at the frontier of groundbreaking filmmaking.

The second honouree is Egyptian actress **Laila Eloui**, who has starred in more than 70 films. Her onscreen presence continues to captivate, entertain and inspire audiences and actors alike. Eloui is undoubtedly one of the most talented and respected actresses in the Arab world, best known for her roles in *I Love Cinema*, *Kalil Mina Al-Hob*, *Kathir Mina Al-Unf* and *Girl’s Love*. She has been the recipient of many Egyptian awards

and international awards at festivals around the world. Red Sea Festival attendees will also be able to join an acting masterclass with Eloui, who will share her knowledge and stories from her fascinating career.

Actress, singer and megastar **Yousra** will also deliver a much-anticipated masterclass. The iconic Egyptian cinema legend is one of the most recognisable names in the entire region and considered one of the finest actors of her generation, having appeared in over 80 films and received more than 50 awards from national, regional and international film festivals for her work. From European cinema, iconic French actress **Catherine Deneuve**, who is renowned for her extraordinary contributions to film, will join the Festival celebrations.

There will also be three in-conversations that will give Festival-goers insight into the careers and achievements of **Haifaa Al-Mansour**, Tunisian actress **Hend Sabry** and acclaimed Franco Argentinian director **Gaspar Noé**, and Lebanese directors and artists Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige.

The Festival is also proud to honour Jack Lang, President of the Institut du Monde Arabe and former Minister of Culture and Minister of Education, in recognition of his incredible efforts to promote relations between Saudi Arabia and France and integral role in building a cultural bridge between the Arab world and France.

Festival-goers will have the opportunity to attend Red Carpet Galas and watch standout, compelling films from world-renowned directors and featuring stellar performances at the Red Sea's purpose-built, 900-seat Al Balad auditorium.

The lineup over the 9 days includes:

Academy Award nominated and Golden Globe winning director **Hany Abu-Assad's** political and emotional thriller **Huda's Salon** will open the Red Sea Competition on 07 December. The female-driven spy thriller inspired by real-life events stars Ali Suliman, Maisa Abd Elhadi, Samer Bisharat and Manal Awad.

Joining the lineup are Saudi directors Sara Mesfer, Jawaher Alamri, Noor Alameer, Hind Al-Fahhad and Fatima Al-Banawi with the GCC premiere of **Becoming**, which tells five women's unique and beautifully illustrated stories in this omnibus film.

Straight from Venice and London acclaim is Maggie Gyllenhaal's directorial debut **The Lost Daughter** starring Academy Award winner Olivia Coleman, Dakota Johnson and Jessie Buckley in the film adaptation of Elena Ferrante's novel of the same name.

The Alleys kick off a triple Arab Gala presentation. The gripping feature directorial debut of writer/director Bassel Ghandour takes place in the claustrophobic back streets of Amman, Jordan, where gossip circles mercilessly and reputation is everything.

Next in the Arab Gala presentation is **Memory Box**, co-directed and co-written by Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige. The story draws inspiration from Hadjithomas' real-life notebooks and letters to her best friend as a teen escaping the Lebanese Civil War for Paris.

Rounding out the Arab Gala is French-Moroccan director Nabil Ayouch's **Casablanca Beats**, a story of Anas, a former rapper, who works in Casablanca and is torn between the threat of religious radicalism, the temptation of modernity and the weight of tradition. The screening will be followed by a live performance from the five rappers from the film.

Ghodwa sees Tunisian actor Dhafer L'Abidine make his feature directorial debut. The film, also written by and starring L'Abidine, explores an unconventional father-son relationship, where the roles become reversed.

Jordanian filmmaker Zaid Abu Hamdan, best known for his acclaimed shorts, makes his feature directorial debut with **Daughters of Abdul-Rahman**, which tells the tale of the reunion of four estranged and offbeat sisters in the wake of their father's sudden disappearance.

Academy-Award nominated Mamoru Hosoda's **Belle** leads the **Next Generation** presentation. The anime feature, written and directed by Hosoda, tells the story of teenaged Suzu, who enters a virtual world called "U", where she is Belle, a musical icon.

The **International Spectacular** double gala presentation begins with Academy-Award winner Giuseppe Tornatore's latest, **Ennio**, a documentary focusing on the late Ennio Morricone, who was among the most influential and prolific musicians of the twentieth century and a longtime collaborator of Tornatore's.

Following critical acclaim in Venice, Ana Lily Amirpour's fantasy thriller **Mona Lisa and the Blood Moon** follows in the **International Spectacular**. Starring Jeon Jong-Seo and Kate Hudson, the film tells the story of a girl with unusual powers who escapes a mental asylum and tries to make it on her own in New Orleans.

Based on a true story, Bridgerton star Phoebe Dynevor plays Clarice Cliff, a remarkable figure who revolutionized the British pottery industry in the 1920s. Sky Original Film **The Colour Room** directed by Claire McCarthy is a fabulous period drama showing how Cliff battled against the odds in a world run by men to establish herself as a pioneering ceramic artist, impressing an eccentric factory owner (Matthew Goode) with her ingenuity.

The Festival will offer a wide variety of cultural events in addition to the main screening presentations, ranging from musical to community outdoor screening events. The music events will consist of standalone acts including original Saudi rappers YR Music and a concert that will pay tribute to classic Egyptian cinema by Rima Khcheich and Band, in addition to performances that complement the Festival's selection of films, including five rappers from the film **Casablanca Beats** and traditional Moroccan Gnawa music to accompany the documentary **Their Heads Are Green And Their Hands Are Blue**, both from the Arab Spectacular.

The **Red Sea Souk**, the Festival's industry market, will offer a packed programme of curated events to foster co-production, international distribution, and new business opportunities. It will run from 8-11 December, alongside the Film Festival.

The Red Sea Souk will consist of the **Project Market**, which will see pitching and meetings for a selection of 23 films in development, and **Works-in-Progress Screenings**, a selection of rough-cut screenings made up of screenings of rough cuts of a selection of films in post-production. All films in the Red Sea Souk will be deliberated on by two separate juries. The **Project Market Jury** will consist of Saudi poet and Festival director Ahmed Almulla, American producer Alix Madigan, and German producer Thanassis Karathanos, while Festival director Alex Moussa Sawadogo, Palestinian filmmaker Annemarie Jacir, and French filmmaker Ladj Ly make up the **Works-in-Progress Jury**. More than 800,000 USD will be awarded to the projects selected in the **Red Sea Souk Awards**.

The Souk will present 7 films in market screenings looking for distribution in market screenings, titles include **Junoon** directed by Maan B. and Yaser B. Khalid, **Soula** directed by Salah Issaad, **Sharaf** directed by Samir Nasr, **Take Me To The Cinema** directed by Albaqer Jaafar, **Ghodwa** directed by Dhaffer L'Abidine and **Daughters of Abdul-Rahman** directed by Zaid Abu Hamdan.

The Red Sea Souk will also welcome a series of key players to lead discussions on a range of the most current topics including the global content boom and demand for content creators, the post-pandemic industry, and sustainable media production. Highlights include a masterclass with Andrea Chignoli, Chile's most prolific fiction and nonfiction film editor, who will lead a masterclass on editing the creative documentary. A conversation moderated by Rashid Abdelh Hamid of the Palestinian Film Institute (PFI) with prominent Palestinian filmmakers Hany Abu- Assad, Annemarie Jacir, and Rashid Masharawi will explore their influences and inspirations, both political and personal, that have shaped contemporary Palestinian cinema.

The Souk will also showcase over 20 local and regional exhibiting companies including, buyers, sales agents, film commissions, distributors, and exhibitors.

Shivani Pandya Malhotra, Managing Director of the RedSeaIFF, said: "The Festival is not only a celebration of cinema but an important opportunity for the Saudi film industry as a whole. The Festival offers not only an international stage to Saudi film professionals, but also demonstrates the abundance of talent and opportunities that Saudi Arabia can offer to the international film industry. The Red Sea Souk, in particular, will play such an important role in global exchange and partnerships between the international and Saudi film industries."

Immediately following the Souk on 12-13 December, the Festival will hold Talent Days, a two-day initiative designed to support the development of the next generation of Saudi filmmakers from Saudi from 12-13 December. Tand the GGC will offer a packed programme ranging from short film platforms, development initiatives, workshops as well as networking sessions with industry professionals.

The Red Sea International Film Festival is generously sponsored by Festival Partners including the MBC Group, Vox Cinemas and Saudia Airlines. Official Sponsors are CORE LIFE, Fawaz Gruosi and Banque Saudi Fransi. Strategic Sponsor is Neom. Support Sponsors are Montana Water, Telfaz11, and Patic. The

Red Sea Souk is powered by Neom and supported by industry sponsors Film AUUA and the Consulate General of France in Jeddah and Friend of the Festival Arabia Pictures.

Box office tickets will go on sale starting 12th November 2021, for more information and to secure your tickets to watch your favorite movies, please visit this link <https://redseafilmfest.com/en/>.

Editors Notes:

Red Sea International Film Festival

The inaugural edition of the Red Sea International Film Festival is set to bring the best in Arab and World Cinema to the UNESCO world heritage site of Jeddah Old Town.

The Festival will showcase a compelling slate of new and diverse films, alongside a retrospective programme celebrating the masters of cinema as well as introducing audiences to exciting new voices from the region and beyond. The Festival will provide a platform for Arab filmmakers and industry professionals from around the world to connect, host feature and short film competitions, and present a series of events, masterclasses, and workshops to support emerging talent.