

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

- *Shekhar Kapur's romantic comedy What's Love Got to Do with It? set to open the Red Sea International Film Festival*
- *The Festival's Closing Film is the World Premiere of Saudi feature film Valley Road, written and directed By Khaled Fahd*
- *Triple Academy Award-Winning Director, Producer and Writer Oliver Stone Will Preside Over the Jury for The Festival's Second Red Sea: Features Competition*
- *The program will feature 131 feature films and shorts from 61 countries in 41 languages from both established and emerging talent and will host 34 World Premieres, 17 Arab Premieres and 47 MENA Premieres*

Jeddah, Saudi Arabia – 31 October 2022:

The Red Sea International Film Festival (Red Sea IFF), in partnership with VOX Cinemas and the MBC GROUP, today unveiled the program for its second edition, which will run from 1-10 December in Jeddah, nestled on the eastern shore of the Red Sea. The Festival will welcome filmmakers, talent, media, industry professionals, and film fans for a 10-day celebration of global cinema.

The Red Sea IFF is thrilled to announce the opening night gala, ***What's Love Got to Do with It?*** directed by Shekhar Kapur (*Elizabeth, Bandit Queen*), written by Jemima Khan and produced by STUDIOCANAL and Working Title. The film stars Lily James, Shazad Latif, Shabana Azmi, Sajal Aly, Asim Chaudhry and Academy Award winner Emma Thompson. Sliding between London and Lahore, love and friendship, tradition and iconoclasm, ***What's Love Got to Do with It?*** is a cross-cultural British romantic comedy that follows a filmmaker who decides to document her best friend's journey towards an arranged marriage. Ivor Novello Lifetime Achievement Award-winning composer Nitin Sawhney CBE has created the music for the film, with British-Pakistani record producer, DJ, songwriter, and musician Naughty Boy and three-time BRIT Award and Mercury Prize nominee, Joy Crookes collaborating on the soundtrack.

The Festival's Closing Film is the world premiere of ***Valley Road*** from award-winning Saudi writer and director Khaled Fahd, starring Hamad Farhan, Naif Khalaf, and Aseel Omran. An uplifting and enchanting feature that follows Ali who is perceived by his family and the people of the beautiful Saudi Arabian mountain village where he lives, Alwadi, as having a disability. Only his older sister Siham recognizes that his difference is part of him. The film beautifully explores human values and encounters that can forge a personality and invites us to take a better look at the fragile people around us.

The program will feature 131 feature films and shorts from 61 countries in 41 languages from both established and emerging talent and will host 34 World Premieres, 17 Arab Premieres and 47 MENA Premieres, with a number of filmmakers and actors in attendance for many of the films. With more films expected to be added in the coming weeks.

Legendary filmmaker Oliver Stone has been chosen to lead the jury of the Red Sea: Features Competition Jury. The three-time Academy award winner is behind some of the all-time masterpieces of

cinema, including *Scarface*, *The Doors*, *Wall Street*, *JFK*, *Midnight Express*, *Platoon*, *Born on the Fourth of July*, *Nixon* and *Natural Born Killers*.

The Red Sea: Competition will showcase the highest creative achievements from filmmakers in its Red Sea Feature and Shorts Competition sections. The line-up of 26 shorts and 16 features showcases an incredible array of talent across both the Arab, African and Asian world, showcasing some of the most exciting, unique and impressive work produced in the past year. Winners in each competition will be selected by esteemed juries and announced on 8 December.

The Festival will also showcase the young voices shaping the filmmaking culture of Saudi Arabia, seven new Saudi features and 18 Saudi short films will be presented to the global film industry and local audiences. With Saudi feature 'Valley Road' taking the high-profile spot of closing the Festival along with two world premieres in the Red Sea: Competition, it's a testament to the impressive filmmaking in the Kingdom.

Alongside the Red Sea: Competition, Red Carpet Galas, Outdoor Screenings and Special Presentations, the Festival will host a range of cinema in the following sections: Festival Favorites, New Saudi/New Cinema, Red Sea: Treasures, Red Sea: Arab and International Spectacular, Red Sea: Family and Children, Red Sea: Virtual Reality, Red Sea: Series, and Red Sea: New Vision, a new strand dedicated to filmmakers pushing the boundaries of creativity with a style of genre-defining filmmaking that will challenge audiences.

Mohammed Al Turki; CEO of the RedSeaIFF added: "The Red Sea International Film Festival is cementing its position as a unique and powerful platform for celebrating film, connecting cultures, and expanding our horizons. FILM IS EVERYTHING encapsulates the festival this year, a bold, cinematic, progressive, and cultural ten-day event for film lovers, storytellers, talent and industry professionals from around the globe. Our programmers have curated the best of Arab and international cinema, talent led galas of some of the most anticipated films of the year, and an exceptional selection from astonishing new Saudi talents who are paving the way in our country's flourishing industry. We are so grateful to the loyal support of our sponsors and the incredible dedication of our talented RSIFF team, and we are excited to welcome everyone to Jeddah for our highly-anticipated second edition."

Festival goers can enjoy access to a bespoke program of in-depth conversations with filmmakers and acting talent which will explore their extraordinary careers and current projects.

This year in-conversations include:

Fatih Akin, a German film director, screenwriter and producer who has won numerous awards for his work including the Golden Bear at the Berlin Film Festival for his film *Head On* (2004), Best Screenplay at the Cannes Film Festival for his film *The Edge of Heaven* (2007), and the Golden Globe Award for Best Foreign Language Film for his film *In the Fade* (2017). His biopic of the German rapper and label boss Xatar, *Rheingold*, starring Emilio Sakraya, will also premiere at the Festival.

20 Years after the global smash hit *Bend it Like Beckham* writer and director Gurinder Chadha will take to the stage to discuss her illustrious career and how the film became a cultural phenomenon. Gurinder Chadha, is one of the UK's most respected filmmakers, and was awarded an O.B.E. in 2006 for her services to the British Film Industry. She was the first-ever British-Asian woman to direct a full-length feature film with her 1993 *Bhaji on the Beach*, going on to gross almost £60 million at the box office, alongside receiving global critical acclaim for its wit, coming-of-age relatability and its uniquely authentic

representation of British-Asian culture. Many also consider it today as a film that was well ahead of its time.

Leading Egyptian actress and one of the greatest stars of the Arab world Mona Zaki made her first performance when she was just 13 years old in *Bel Araby Al Faseeh* with the famous Director and Actor Mohamed Sobhi, and her raw talent and onscreen charm rapidly saw her become a favorite in Arab cinema.

Also from Egypt, the Festival will welcome veteran actor Hussein Fahmy whose career spans more than five decades, directing and appearing in over 100 film, television, and theatre productions. This year he returned to the role of president of the Cairo International Film Festival after a 21-year absence. Festival goers will also get the opportunity to watch Fahmy in the beloved Egyptian classic ***Khali Balak Min Zouzou*** (Watch Out for Zouzou) directed by Hassan Al-Imam (1972). Celebrating 50 years since its release, the film has been lovingly restored for audiences to discover or see again on the big screen.

Tunisian film director and Oscar nominee Kaouther Ben Hania will share insights into her acclaimed career which began in Tunisia and, throughout her four short films, documentary and four feature films, the work she crafted is deeply rooted in life and social satire. *'Beauty and the Dogs'* competed at the 2017 edition of Un Certain Regard, and her fourth film, *'The Man who Sold his Skin'*, starring Monica Bellucci, was screened as part of the Orizzonti program of the 2020 Venice International Film Festival, and was the first Tunisian film nominated for the Best International Feature Film at the Academy Awards.

Festival-goers will have the opportunity to attend Red Carpet Galas and enjoy a celebration of the most exciting and innovative cinematic storytelling from around the world at the Red Sea's 1,200 seated auditorium hosted at the Ritz Carlton.

The line-up includes:

World premiering as a Gala screening is Saudi director Fahad Alammari's ***Alkhalat+***. From the creators of the generation-defining digital series "AlKhalat", which amassed over 1.5 billion views during its 22-episode run, it is an anthology film of social deception and trickery in four unlikely places. Two thieves crash a wedding to save their co-conspirator. A chef working in a fine-dining restaurant puts the establishment on the line to save her parents' failing marriage. A friend returns to a morgue to bury a secret from the deceased's wife. A mother searches for her husband while he searches for their son in a nightclub. There's always a way out, and whoever has a trick in their bag, they shall use it.

Award-winning Lebanese director Lara Saba brings audiences the world premiere of ***All Roads Lead to Rome***, a romantic comedy in the unlikely setting of a convent. Hadi (Chadi Haddad), a famous young actor, sees an opportunity to break free from the mediocre television series that made his name when he's asked to audition for a film role as the young Pope. A beautiful journey begins that will bring Hadi to a new understanding of what really matters to him: nature, human connections, love and generosity.

Broker, is a South Korean drama directed and written by Hirokazu Kore-eda is inspired by the local baby box phenomenon. Church volunteer Sang-Hyeon (Parasite's Song Kang-ho) and his friend Dong-soon (Gang Dong-won) surreptitiously steal and sell these foundlings to eager adoptive parents, arguing it circumvents red tape. When So Young (Lee Ji-Eun) has second thoughts and finds her child gone, she joins forces with the two scammers, going on the road with them to meet prospective adopters.

The Banshees of Inisherin, a dark comedy-drama and one of the best reviewed films of the year from director and writer Martin McDonagh (*Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri*). Set on a remote island

off the west coast of Ireland, Colin Farrell and Brendan Gleeson play two lifelong friends who find themselves at an impasse when one abruptly ends their relationship, with alarming consequences for both of them.

Park Chan-Wook won best director honors for his Hitchcockian thriller for ***Decision to Leave*** at the Cannes Film Festival this year. ***Decision to Leave***, is a beautifully constructed mystery thriller involving a detective (Park Hae-il) who finds himself too attached to a very complex criminal case that he is investigating. While delving deep into the murder investigation and chasing down leads, he finds himself being bombarded by all sorts of conflicts when he falls in love with the prime suspect (Tang Wei).

Set in an English seaside town in the early 1980s, ***Empire of Light*** is a powerful and poignant story about human connection and the magic of cinema, directed and written by Academy Award-winning director Sam Mendes. ***Empire of Light*** features a stellar cast led by Academy Award winner Olivia Colman, BAFTA winner Micheal Ward and Academy Award winner Colin Firth. It also reunites Mendes with Academy Award winning cinematographer Roger Deakins (1917, Skyfall).

How I Got There is a co-production between Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, and a labor of love from award-winning director Zeyad Alhusaini who spent 15 years crafting this dramatic action film, the first of its kind to be set in the Gulf. When two childhood friends – now grown up and dabbling in the illegal alcohol trade – find a cache of stolen guns, they jump at the chance to get rich quick. The film starring Yaqoob Abdullah, Hamad Al Omani, Ron Perlman, and Jaaved Jaaferi takes audiences on a wild ride with its naïve protagonists encountering a murky world of arms dealers, terrorists, mercenaries and small-time gangsters.

From Egyptian director, writer and producer John Ikram Sawers comes ***Kamla***, the story of the title character who is deeply committed to her work as a psychiatrist; her patients find her both supportive and accepting. However, society does not necessarily accept her as she's an unmarried woman in her 40s, still living with her elderly father. Her aunt, Ansaf, insists on bringing around potential husbands and believes that if she keeps refusing them, it must be because she is no longer chaste. But Kamla has, in fact, met a man – a glamorous writer, Youssif, who speaks in defense of love, freedom and women's rights – and fallen in love.

The Family Gala screening, ***Puss in Boots: The Last Wish***, is the animated comedy adventure film directed by Joel Crawford with Antonio Banderas, Salma Hayek and Florence Pugh voicing the characters. Families are invited to join Puss in Boots on an epic journey to find the mythical Last Wish and restore his nine lives.

Queens, the uplifting feature debut from Moroccan filmmaker Yasmine Benkiran starring Nisrin Erradi, Nisrine Benchara, and Rayhan Guaran impressed audiences and critics at the Venice Film Festival earlier this year. ***Queens*** is the sprawling, colorful adventure film that begins in Casablanca, where a trio of women with the police on their tail embark on long escape that takes them across the rugged red terrain and flower-filled valleys of the Atlas desert to reach the Atlantic coast.

Prolific Moroccan directors Adil El Arbi and Bilall Fallah's latest film ***Rebel*** is an immensely powerful, personal, and nuanced portrayal of a family torn apart over a little Muslim boy's future. Featuring powerhouse performances from Amir El Arbi, Aboubakr Bensaihi and Tara Abboud, the film, was one of the most challenging and impressive films at this year's Cannes Film Festival which must be seen to be believed.

In Ruben Östlund's wickedly funny Palme d'Or winner ***Triangle of Sadness***, social hierarchy is turned upside down, revealing the tawdry relationship between power and beauty. Celebrity model couple, Carl (Harris Dickinson) and Yaya (Charlbi Dean) are invited on a luxury cruise for the uber-rich, helmed by an unhinged boat captain (Woody Harrelson). What first appeared instagrammable ends catastrophically, leaving the survivors stranded on a desert island and fighting for survival.

The **Red Sea Souk**, the Festival's industry market platform, will offer a packed program of curated events to foster co-production, international distribution, and encourage new business opportunities.

Representatives from 46 countries will attend the Souk which runs from 3-6 December to network and enjoy access to the vibrant new Saudi scene, as well as the best of the Arab and African production.

The **Project Market**, will see pitching and coproduction meetings for its selection of 23 films from Arab and African directors, in development or production, and a showcase of six Work-In-Progress screenings, a 'sneak-peek' of their forthcoming feature to an audience of accredited industry professionals that can help them reach the finish line.

All Souk selected projects will compete for cash prizes offered by the Red Sea Fund, to be awarded by two juries. The Project Market's jury will award a \$35,000 fund for the Jury Special Mention Award both for Development and \$100,000 for production. All selected projects are eligible for additional awards sponsored by the Red Sea Souk sponsors and partners totaling in \$500,000.

Shivani Pandya Malhotra, Managing Director of the RedSealFF, said: "The country is rapidly securing its position as a hub for film, culture, arts, and fashion as it becomes a world-class center for film production. The Red Sea IFF is very much at the heart of this transformation providing a platform to showcase a new generation full of energy and creativity. Through the Red Sea Souk, we are in position to support filmmakers in all stages of their careers and our programs throughout the year follow the full-cycle of filmmaking. We are delighted to be welcoming acclaimed international and Arab talent, pioneering industry leaders, the next generation of filmmakers and exciting gamechangers for a program of screenings, in-person panels, masterclasses, networking and talks at a time of immense change to ensure we are part of the wider global conversation."

Taking place on December 7-8, as part of the Red Sea Souk activities, **Talent Days** is a series of sessions designed to nurture a new generation of filmmakers. It is an initiation into the cinema industry for aspiring filmmakers through inspirational talks and individual meetings. Acclaimed director Kaouther Ben Hania will lead the second edition of Talent Days and will be joined by creatives from around the world, including Rania Attieh, Raed El Mansari, Hakim Mao, Kathia Bayer and Jonathan Goldman who will be mentoring to support the professional development of talent.

In addition, Talent Days will feature a special network of international industry key leaders from AFAC, USC, Nomadis Film, Netflix, Cineways, EAVE, and MPM Film who are participating to discover authentic new voices they hope to be working with in the future.

The Red Sea Souk also offers opportunities for networking and building collaborations for future projects. Three sessions hosted throughout the Souk will cover development, production, and distribution and are designed to foster the connections between key industry players, filmmakers, and Festival attendees as well as offer a comprehensive and nurturing journey from script to screen.

The Souk will showcase 43 exhibiting companies from 10 countries including sales companies, film commissions, national cinema pavilion, post-production studios, and main festival industry sponsors.

The Red Sea International Film Festival is generously sponsored by Festival Partners MBC Group and VOX Cinemas. Official Sponsors are Loreal Paris and Loreal Professional, Saudi Research and Media Group, Audience Awards Sponsors are Film AIUla and Neom as Red Sea Souk Sponsor. Support Sponsors are Montana Water and Telfaz11.

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About The Red Sea International Film Festival

The second edition of the Red Sea International Film Festival will screen the best of the Arab and international cinema in Jeddah. The Festival will also showcase a retrospective program to celebrate the masters of cinema. The Red Sea International Film Festival is a platform for Arab filmmakers and industry professionals from around the world to connect, host competitions for short and feature films, and organize masterclasses to support emerging talent. It will take place from December 1 — 10, 2022.