

# TREASURES FROM THE YALE FILM ARCHIVE

AN ONGOING SERIES OF CLASSIC AND CONTEMPORARY FILMS PRESENTED IN 35MM BY THE YALE FILM ARCHIVE

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 2,  
7 P.M. • HUMANITIES  
QUADRANGLE  
ALICE CINEMA

# WADJDA

PRESENTED WITH SUPPORT FROM  
PAUL L. JOSKOW '70 M.PHIL., '72 PH.D.



"The most important thing is that I was able to make a film, an authentic film, and it's the first film entirely shot in Saudi. It's an amazing thing." —Haifaa al-Mansour

Dreams of buying a prized green bicycle lead a young Saudi girl to enter a Koran recitation competition in a 2012 film described as "an uplifting mini-miracle" (Larushka Ivan-Zadeh), a "winsome wonder" (Lisa Kennedy), and "essential viewing for anyone who cares about contemporary cinema" (David Stratton). Influenced by De Sica, Panahi, and the Dardenne brothers, WADJDA is "a notable example of old-school, humanistic filmmaking" (Walter Addiego) that takes audiences into intimate Saudi spaces rarely depicted on film. "With impressive agility," notes A.O. Scott, "WADJDA finds room to maneuver between harsh realism and a more hopeful kind of storytelling. There is warmth as well as austerity in WADJDA's world, kindness as well as cruelty, and the possibility, modestly sketched and ardently desired, of change."

N<sup>o</sup>. 16  
SEASON 7

Raised in Riyadh, writer/director Haifaa al-Mansour studied comparative literature at the American University in Cairo and film at the University of Sydney. She refined her screenplay for WADJDA at the Sundance Institute writer's lab, and secured funding from Prince Alwaleed bin Talal's Rotana Studios, the German company Razor Film (whose credits already included the Middle Eastern-focused films PARADISE NOW and WALTZ WITH BASHIR), and additional German backers and broadcasters. (Her film crew was largely German as well.) The film's star—Waad Mohammed—was found a week before principal shooting began. "A lot of Saudis don't want their girls to be in front of camera," Al-Mansour remarked, but then "Waad came in wearing jeans and Chuck Taylor sneakers, hair curled, listening to Justin Bieber." Al-Mansour said of the children in the cast, "They were excited, because they are part of something that doesn't happen anywhere in Saudi, and I felt they were really appreciative of the moment." Most of the cast—including Waad, Abdullrahman al-Gohani as her friend Abdullah, and Sultan al-Assaf as her father—were first-time, non-professional actors. Two exceptions were Saudi television star Reem Abdullah in the role of the mother, and Ahd Kamel (known for BBC's COLLATERAL) as the headmistress.

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY HAIFAA AL-MANSOUR  
CINEMATOGRAPHY BY LUTZ REITEMEIER  
PRODUCED BY RAZOR FILM PRODUKTION GMBH  
(2102), 98 MINS.  
STARRING WAAD MOHAMMED, REEM ABDULLAH,  
ABDULLRAHMAN AL-GOHANI, AHD KAMEL,  
SULTAN AL-ASSAF, AND ALANOUD SAJINI

WADJDA was filmed in Riyadh, where the threat of the religious police shaped the crew's work. "We were always fast when we knew they were around, and would wrap and switch location," producer Gerhard Meixner noted. Al-Mansour was not permitted to be seen in public with her male crew members, so she had to direct the film's many street scenes via walkie-talkie while stationed in a van with a video monitor, a process that increased the rehearsal time and advance planning needed for each scene. "I wasn't trying to clash with people, I was trying to make a film," Al-Mansour said about the necessity of working within those restrictions. "And I know people, if they see me, they will get offended, or people will come question and try to stop us. I don't want to provoke people. I'm making a film in Saudi Arabia—I'm a woman—about a young girl who wants a bicycle. That's enough. I don't have to push it."

The film avoids sloganeering through its focus on a plucky child, a character Hannah McGill says "gives pleasurable vent to the audience's frustration". (In his review, Jake Wilson claimed "the trick of using childish innocence to reveal adult hypocrisy is virtually foolproof".) This points to Al-Mansour's clear-eyed but hopeful views of her home country. "There are a lot of films coming from the Middle East that complain about the situation, and for me, it's done," she remarked. "We know how it is difficult and how things are in the Middle East. But the next step is to change it, and change on our personal level, and move away from 'it is a bad situation' [to] how we can be happy, how we can achieve a dream, how we have confidence in ourselves to move ahead."

WADJDA's world premiere was on August 31, 2012, at the Venice Film Festival. It received awards from Venice, Rotterdam, Dubai, and the National Board of Review, and it was nominated for a BAFTA for Best Foreign Film. Though it was Saudi Arabia's first submission to the Academy Awards, it was not shown in Saudi cinemas: they were banned from 1983 to 2018.

**DID YOU KNOW:** SAUDI ARABIA LIFTED ITS BAN ON WOMEN BICYCLING—IN CERTAIN PARKS, WITH A MALE RELATIVE FOR A CHAPERONE—IN APRIL, 2013, SEVEN MONTHS AFTER WADJDA'S PREMIERE. THE COUNTRY'S FIRST BIKE RACE FOR WOMEN TOOK PLACE IN APRIL, 2018.

**NEXT UP:** WE'RE MAKING YOU AN OFFER YOU CAN'T REFUSE AND BRINGING YOU BRAND-NEW PRINTS OF FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA'S CRIME-FAMILY CLASSICS. **THE GODFATHER** (1972) SCREENS ON **THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 9 AT 7 P.M.**, FOLLOWED BY **THE GODFATHER PART II** (1974) ON **FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 10 AT 7 P.M.**