



VERMONT INTERNATIONAL FILM FOUNDATION

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### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

#### **Announcing Global Roots Film Festival: Films from the Middle East**

Burlington, VT: (January 17, 2016): The Vermont International Film Foundation is pleased to announce the 2016 Global Roots Film Festival: Films From The Middle East. The festival will take place February 11-13, at Contois Auditorium in downtown Burlington. The festival features films from Israel, Palestine, Jordan and Saudi Arabia.

Two filmmakers will be attending and introducing their films: Leila Sansour (*Open Bethlehem*) and Roger Sherman (*In Search of Israeli Cuisine*). Both will be available for interviews before and during the festival.

The festival was made possible with the support of the Sisters of Mercy Peace Initiative and the Burlington-Bethlehem-Arad Sister City Program.

#### **Overview:**

Global Roots was launched by VTIFF in 2013 as a means of bringing great films from the countries of many of the New American communities in Vermont, to foster a greater understanding of our diverse cultures. Part of VTIFF's mission is to work with and for the community, and the 16 films shown between 2013 & 2015 as part of Global Roots reflected the richness and diversity of the population.

#### **Schedule:**

## **Thursday, Feb 11**

6:00pm – Reception/cash bar, meet filmmaker Leila Sansour

7:00pm – Screening: *Open Bethlehem*

## **Friday, Feb 12**

11:15am – *Almost Friends*

4:00pm – *Theeb*

6pm – Reception + cash bar

7pm – Double Bill: *Women in Sink* + *Write Down, I'm an Arab*

## **Saturday, Feb 13**

12:45 pm – *Omar*

3:00 pm – *In Search of Israeli Cuisine*

5:30 pm – Israeli/Palestinian food + cash bar – meet filmmaker Roger Sherman

6:30 pm – *Wadjda*

## **OPEN BETHLEHEM**

Directed by Leila Sansour

Palestine | Documentary | 2014 | 92 mins

Filmed over four critical years in the life of Bethlehem, this most famous little town also happens to be Palestinian director Leila Sansour's hometown. She left it as a teenager, pledging never to return. But in 2004 she went home for Christmas. The journey changed her life. Armed with a camera and a family car that keeps breaking down, she sets out to create an intimate chronicle of a historical town in peril. Ten years on, with 700 hours of footage, the result is nothing like she had expected.

This film is an emotional journey of one woman in a struggle to save her hometown. It takes viewers deep into the world of Bethlehem and paints a portrait of the city as it has never been seen before.

## **ALMOST FRIENDS**

Directed by Nitzan Ofir and Barak Heyman

Israel | Fiction | Hebrew & Arabic w/English subtitles | 2014 | 60 min

Intro and Q&A with Orly Yadin, Executive Director, VTIFF

Less than 70 kilometers separate Lod and Tlamim, but the residents are a world apart. Through an education program aimed at bridging gaps in Israeli society, sixth grade students from a secular school in the impoverished city of Lod and a religious school in the settlement of Tlamim are paired as online pen pals. Samar, an Arab girl from Lod and Linor, a Jewish settler who lives in Tlamim represent the extremes of these differences. Still, a spark is ignited in their online relationship and a friendship is formed. But when the two girls have the opportunity to meet, their families enter into a profound and complex experience. This warm and funny film gives us a fresh and, at times, shocking look at the complexity of Israeli-Palestinian culture through the experiences of teenage girls

## **THEEB**

Directed by Naji Abu Nowar | Jordan/UK/United Arab Emirates/Qatar | Arabic w/ English subtitles | 2015 | Fiction | 96 mins

Nominated for the 2016 Academy Awards; Best Director, Venice

Fans of David Lean's *Lawrence of Arabia* might recognize the World War I-era clash of the British and Ottoman empires amidst the windswept desert landscapes of the Arabian Peninsula, but the taut narrative and unadorned action of *Theeb* more closely resemble the barebones Westerns of Budd Boetticher and Anthony Mann than the epic leanings of Lean. Set in the Hijaz region of present-day Saudi Arabia, *Theeb* (meaning "wolf" in Arabic) focuses on a Bedouin boy who tags along with his brother on an ill-fated journey to guide a British soldier to a strategically situated water well. But unlike George Stevens' archetypal western *Shane*, told through the merely observant eyes of a hero-worshipping boy during the late 19th century Wyoming range wars, an ironic twist of fate turns the young protagonist of *Theeb* into a reluctant hero in this beautifully shot and morally ambivalent feature debut.

## WOMEN IN SINK

Directed by Iris Zaki

Israel | Hebrew w/English subtitles | 36 mins

Most Innovative Mid-Length/ Visions du Réel 2015

Special Jury Mention, Karlovy Vary 2015

Introduced by Orly Yadin, Executive Director, VTIFF

At “Fifi’s”, a hair salon owned by a Christian Arab in Haifa, Zaki installs a minimalist film set over the sink, where she converses with the clients she’s shampooing. She thus paints an unexpected choral portrait of this space that provides temporary freedom; where women share their differences and/or a community of views on politics, history and love.

## WRITE DOWN, I’M AN ARAB

Directed by Ibtisam Mara’ana Menuhin

Israel | Arabic/Hebrew with English subtitles | 55 mins

Winner of the Audience Award at Doc Aviv, 2014; Official selection Hot Docs, 2014.

Mahmoud Darwish is the Palestinian national poet and one of the most influential writers of the Arab world. In 1964 Darwish was imprisoned for his defiant poem, Write Down, I am an Arab. At around this time he met and fell in love with Tamar Ben-Ami, a young Jewish-Israeli to whom he wrote love letters in Hebrew, which she kept secret for decades. Darwish was speech writer and confidant to Yasser Arafat, and for years during and after his exile, was a powerful voice for Palestinian people until his death in 2008. Through his poetry, secret love letters and exclusive archival materials, this film unearths the story behind the man. Poignantly, the filmmaker herself is also an Arab Israeli married to a Jewish Israeli.

## OMAR

Directed by Hani Abu-Assad

Palestine | Arabic/Hebrew w/English subtitles | 96 mins

Palestinian entry to Oscars in 2014, Cannes 2014 Un Certain Regard – Special Jury Prize

“This is a subtle political film that fully dramatises a situation and lets us think out its contradictions for ourselves. Director Abu-Assad made a mark in 2006 with his Paradise Now, a deeply provocative drama about suicide bombers. In a similar but somewhat more thriller-esque vein comes Omar, about a young man caught between love and his commitment to the Palestinian cause. Adam Bakri plays the hero, a young militant who goes on a mission with his two best friends, gets captured by Israeli intelligence, and realises that compromise and subterfuge may be the only way to win Nadia (Lubany), his friend’s sister, whom he intends to marry. As the intrigue tightens, so do the visuals. Sharply and sensitively acted, vibrantly shot by Ehab Assal (lots of Middle Eastern shades of terracotta and orange) and very briskly edited, Omar has the intimacy of a star-crossed romance and the political and moral complexity of a le Carré story. It’s a lean, controlled film and most compelling.” Jonathan Romney in the London Observer

## IN SEARCH OF ISRAELI CUISINE

Directed by Roger Sherman

USA | Mostly English | 97 mins

Featuring chef Solomonov

Mike Solomonov is the chef/guide of In Search of Israeli Cuisine. He is a 2011 James Beard Award winner for Best Chef, Mid-Atlantic; and a 2015 semi-finalist for Rising Star Chef of the Year.

Director’s statement: “It may be surprising to learn that a major culinary revolution is taking place in a country so frequently associated with political drama. Like many, hummus and falafel were all I knew about Israeli Cuisine. I discovered a vibrant restaurant scene in Tel Aviv that rivals New York, San Francisco, London and, yes, Paris. And, more and more of Jerusalem’s restaurants, once thought stuffy, are must-experience destinations. I tasted wines from some of the 350 boutique wineries gaining international acclaim. I savored distinctive cheeses that you’d find in France or Italy. And, I found remarkable food traditions as diverse as Moroccan, Persian, and Lebanese, French, Italian, and

Russian, in the most cutting-edge restaurants Jewish, Arabs, Palestinians, Christian, and Druze kosher and non-kosher, secular and religious.”

## WADJDA

Directed by Haifaa Al-Mansour

Saudi Arabia | Arabic w/English subtitles | 98 mins

A rebellious Saudi girl (Waad Mohammed) enters a Koran recitation competition at her school and hopes to win enough money to buy her own bicycle. Understated yet expressly political, Wadjda is a story of a simple, universal desire that becomes a bold provocation only in the context of its setting. Wadjda is a spunky, loud preteen who parades in her room to American pop songs and doesn't hide the dirty sneakers she wears underneath her abaya. She sneaks playdates with Abdullah, a neighbor boy from a different tribe. When she decides she wants to race Abdullah on wheels, she enters a Quran recitation competition at her school in the hopes of buying a bike with the prize money.

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The Vermont International Film Foundation (VTIFF) is a cultural non-profit organization whose mission is to enrich the community through film. VTIFF operates year-round and showcases community film screenings, supports programming like the Global Roots Series, the Burlington Film Society and VTIFF For Schools, as well as supporting Vermont filmmakers. VTIFF celebrated its 30th anniversary in 2015. The largest program of the Foundation is the annual Vermont International Film Festival, best known for featuring groundbreaking and independent films from around the world and Vermont. The festival also includes the Vermont Filmmakers' Showcase™, the largest juried selection of Vermont-made films. More information at [www.vtiff.org](http://www.vtiff.org).

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