



# Amerrika

## Een film van Cherien Dabis

Canada · 2009 · drama · 35mm · color · 92' · Dolby Digital · 2.35:1



Muna is een alleenstaande Palestijnse moeder. Ondanks haar scheiding, een overbezorgde moeder en de dagelijkse problemen bij de controleposten op de Westelijke Jordaanoever, probeert ze vrolijk en optimistisch te blijven. Maar het leven binnen de bezette gebieden is niet makkelijk en de toekomst niet veelbelovend. Op een dag ontvangt Muna onverwachts een brief met goed nieuws. Ze krijgt de kans om dit leven achter zich te laten en in de Verenigde Staten te gaan wonen. Samen met haar zoon Fadi vertrekt ze naar haar zus in Illinois die hier vijftien jaar eerder naartoe verhuisde. Na een warm weerzien moeten Mouna en Fadi hun plaats zien te vinden in dit 'Amerrika' waar ze zo vaak van gedroomd hebben. Dit valt niet altijd mee.

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## CAST

Muna Farah	NISREEN FAOUR
Fadi Farah	MELKAR MUALLEM
Raghda Halaby	HIAM ABBASS
Salma Halaby	ALIA SHAWKAT
Nabeel Halaby	YUSSEF ABU WARDA
Mr. Novatski	JOSEPH ZIEGLER
Samer	AMER HLEHEL
Lamis Halaby	SELENA HADDAD
Rana Halaby	JENNA KAWAR
Jamileh	SUHEILA MUALLEM
Matt	BRODIE SANDERSON
James	ANDREW SANNIE
Mike	DANIEL BOITEAU
Jason	JEFF SUTTON
Bank Employee	MIRIAM SMITH
Nelson	GLEN THOMPSON

## CREW

Director/Writer	CHERIEN DABIS
Producer	CHRISTINA PIOVESAN
Producer	PAUL BARKIN
Co-Producers	LIZ JARVIS
	AL-ZAIN AL-SABAH
Executive Producers	ALICIA SAMS
	CHERIEN DABIS
	GREGORY KEEVER
Director of Photography	TOBIAS DATUM
Production Designer	AIDAN LEROUX
Editor	KEITH REAMER
Composer	KAREEM ROUSTOM
Music Supervisor	DOUG BERNHEIM



## Long Synopsis

Amid the daily humiliations of West Bank checkpoints, her boring job in a bank and her nagging mother, Muna Farah (Nisreen Faour) struggles to get as much happiness as she can from life. Her greatest joy is her son Fadi (Melkar Muallen), for whom she stretches her modest salary to keep in private school. Still, when Muna finds out she's received a U.S. Green Card, she's torn between doing what's best for Fadi's future and saying goodbye to her family and everything she knows. But after Fadi has one too many tense altercations with an Israeli soldier, the perils of remaining home become all too clear, and she makes up her mind to emigrate.

Muna and Fadi arrive in the U.S. at the onset of the Iraq War, an unwelcoming time and place to be from the Middle East. As suspicious customs agents rifle through their suitcases, Muna's life's savings is confiscated. Moving in with her sister Raghda (Hiam Abbass), Raghda's doctor husband Nabeel Halaby (Yussef Abu-Warda) and their three young daughters in a rural Illinois town, she soon realizes she's penniless and that her 10 years of experience as a banker and her two degrees don't count for much.

Muna learns that Raghda and Nabeel have money troubles of their own. Desperate to help, Muna swallows her pride and secretly takes a job at the local White Castle. Meanwhile, Fadi is ostracized and teased at school. Anxious to fit in, he leans on his rebellious cousin, Salma, (Alia Shawkat) and her boyfriend. Soon he is getting into trouble and becoming increasingly estranged from his mother. When Fadi gets into a fight with one of his tormentors at school, Muna goes to see the principal (Joseph Ziegler) in search of answers, but instead finds the comfort of an unexpected friend.

Eventually Muna's secret is revealed, and Muna and Fadi's worlds collide. The time has come for Muna to teach Fadi a vital lesson about who he is—a lesson that heals and binds them both.

Told with heartfelt humor by award-winning writer-director Cherien Dabis in her feature film debut, *Amerrika* is a universal journey into the lives of a family of immigrants and first-generation teenagers caught between their heritage and the new world in which they now live and the bittersweet search for a place to call home.

*Amerrika* recalls Dabis's family's memories of their lives in rural America. The film stars Haifa-trained actress Nisreen Faour as Muna, and Melkar Muallen plays her 16-year-old son, Fadi. Also in the cast are Hiam Abbass, Alia Shawkat, Yussef Abu-Warda and Joseph Ziegler. Written and directed by Cherien Dabis, *Amerrika* was produced by Christina Piovesan and Paul Barkin. Alicia Sams, Dabis and Gregory Kever were executive producers; Liz Jarvis and Al-Zain Al-Sabah were co-producers.

National Geographic Entertainment will release *Amerrika* in September 2009. *Amerrika* is a First Generation Films-Alcina Pictures-Buffalo Gal Pictures/Eagle Vision Media Group Production, presented by E1 Entertainment in association with Levantine Entertainment, Rotana Studios and Showtime Arabia.

*Amerrika* made its world premiere in dramatic competition at the 2009 Sundance Film Festival, and played as Opening Night of New Directors/New Films, a co-presentation of The Museum of

Modern Art and The Film Society of Lincoln Center.

National Geographic Entertainment (NGE) combines into a single operating group National Geographic's Cinema Ventures, Films, Kids Entertainment, Home Entertainment and Music & Radio. NGE is part of National Geographic Global Media, bringing together all of National Geographic's editorial platforms in order to streamline collaboration and further support the Society's mission. Founded in 1888 to "increase and diffuse geographic knowledge," National Geographic works to inspire people to care about the planet. It reaches more than 360 million people worldwide each month through magazines, books, digital media, and television, radio, music and film. It funds more than 250 scientific research, exploration and conservation projects each year and supports an education program combating geography illiteracy. For more information, visit [www.nationalgeographic.com](http://www.nationalgeographic.com)

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### About the Production

Amerrika is a film that writer/director Cherien Dabis very much needed to make. It's a personal story that draws on her own memories of growing up with her Palestinian/Jordanian family in rural Ohio.



"My parents immigrated to the U.S. right before I was born. I was born in Omaha, Nebraska, and grew up in rural Ohio and Jordan. When people ask me where I'm from, it's always a confusing question," Dabis explains. "For most of my life I felt like I wasn't American enough for the Americans, nor was I Arab enough for the Arabs. And as a Palestinian, I inherited my father's quandary in not having a nation or a national identity, which only exacerbated my sense of not belonging anywhere. My own desire for a place to call home, a place where I belonged, was always a very big part of my identity."

In Ohio, during the first Gulf War, Dabis's family was ostracized. Dabis, who was 14 at the time, says, "We got death threats and the Secret Service even came to my high school to investigate a rumor that my 17-year-old sister threatened to kill the President."

As Dabis's family returned to Jordan regularly, she was able to see what was happening in the world from different perspectives. "In my travels to and from the Middle East, watching and reading news from different perspectives, from Arabic satellite to English news, I started to see how the media often made way for more conflict and misunderstanding, perpetuating stereotypes that affected me and my family in this small Ohio town."

Dabis looked to art as a way to understand and define herself. "I tried a lot of different means of

creative expression,” she says, “but ultimately film emerged. It uses the universal language of emotion and gives you the power to reach out to people in a way that interested me most. When you thinly veil something as fiction, I think people are more willing to sit back, let their guards down and let themselves be affected by a story.”

Entering film school in New York City in September 2001 thrust Dabis once again into the same issues she had confronted in her teenage years. “When 9/11 happened, the U.S. was invading Iraq again, history was repeating itself,” she says. “There was, and still is, incredible suspicion and fear of Arabs, even if they’re American. That was when I realized that it was time to sit down and write my version of the coming-to-America story.”

In choosing a title, Dabis used the Arabic word for “America.” “Amerrika was my way of finding a title for a movie that’s about the melding of two cultures,” she says, “depicting my experiences and the experience of so many other first-generation immigrants.”

The lead character of Muna in Amerrika is loosely based on Dabis’s aunt. “By the time she immigrated to the U.S., I was old enough to see her struggle,” says Dabis. Like Dabis’s aunt, Muna not only has to deal with what every new immigrant deals with, fitting into a new culture and environment, she also has to contend with an unfriendly political climate that creates preconceived and unfair notions of who she is and where she came from. “But she’s too full of hope to see the odds,” says Dabis. “That’s my aunt, the eternal optimist. It was that quality in her that inspired the character of Muna.”

Dabis’s screenplay eventually found its way into the hands of Toronto-based producer Christina Piovesan. While her mother is Palestinian-Lebanese, Piovesan had never experienced Middle Eastern culture firsthand, and was looking for a movie set in the Arab world to help her understand her roots. “I started to look for filmmakers who were Middle Eastern, Arab or Arab Americans, and I found Cherien in a Filmmaker Magazine article,” says Piovesan. “I emailed her, asked to read her script and loved it, and from there we started talking.” It took Piovesan three years to pull the financing together, from Middle Eastern sources (Showtime Arabia, Rotana Studios), Arab-American patrons and Canadian tax incentives.

Dabis traveled for months to find the right cast for Amerrika. Casting sessions took place in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Dearborn, Toronto, Winnipeg, Paris, Amman, Beirut, Haifa, Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Ramallah. “I knew this was a movie that would ultimately either succeed or fail based on the acting,” she says. “So I wasn’t going to stop until I found the perfect cast.”

Dabis found her lead character of Muna Farah in Palestinian actress Nisreen Faour. Born in the northern Israeli village of Ma’a lot-Tarshisha, Faour moved to the U.S. at age 16 to study arts and performance. She has since acted in numerous plays around the world, as well as the film *In the Eighth Month*. “Nisreen had a sweetness about her,” says Dabis, “a kindness and a childlike sense of wonder. There was something about her that was so youthful, and yet, I could still see in her eyes the depth of sadness that her life experience had given her.” Faour quickly found an emotional connection with Muna: “She was raised to be kind to everyone. She’s a pure human being who wants the best for her son. She’s a lonely person, but she wants to really live.”

Fifteen-year-old Melkar Muallem makes his film debut as Muna’s rebellious son, Fadi. “Melkar

understands so much about the world, partly because he lives in the Palestinian city of Ramallah, in the West Bank,” says Dabis. “There was something about him that was angry, yet bottled up, and there was something about him that was political, yet refusing to be. He’s a kid, yet he has a maturity about him, and he has the ability to be the man as well, which is what I was looking for in the relationship between Muna and her son Fadi.” Muallem hopes that Amerrika can help give people a broader idea of who Palestinians are: “We are not terrorists, and we do not train from an early age to make bombs. This is totally wrong—we’re just human beings like anyone else, and learn the same stuff in school. I think there are good people and bad people everywhere.”

Fadi’s aunt, Raghda Halaby, is portrayed by Hiam Abbass, a celebrated Palestinian actress whose extensive credits include the *The Visitor* (as the mother), the Academy Award-nominated *Paradise Now*, and roles opposite Natalie Portman, Juliette Binoche and Gerard Depardieu. Yussef Abu Warda, a theatre actor from Haifa, plays his first English-speaking role as Nabeel, Raghda’s husband. Raghda and Nabeel’s daughter, Salma, is played by American-born Alia Shawkat, who has worked steadily as an actress since she was cast at age 11 in the ABC Family series “*State of Grace*” and is well known for her role as Maeby in Fox’s hit series “*Arrested Development*.”

While Dabis was able to rehearse with her two lead actors before production, she didn’t have much time to prepare with the others. “On set, we continued the rehearsal process as much as possible,” says Dabis. “And through some improvisation techniques, we worked together to go beyond what was on the page to bring out even more reality and truth in each moment. Because of that collaboration, there were a lot of scenes that turned out to be so much better than I ever imagined they would be. I felt such familiarity with all the actors and all of the characters that sometimes I’d look at the actors on set and think: this is my family.”

Scenes of rural Illinois were filmed in Winnipeg, Canada, but creating an authentic picture of Ramallah required location shooting. “A lot of Palestinians leave Palestine because the situation there makes life so unbearable,” says Dabis. “I wanted to make sure I captured the daily existence of Palestinians in the West Bank.

Dabis had her heart set on White Castle as the fast food restaurant where Muna takes a job. “Everybody tried to talk her out of it, because with our budget, it didn’t seem possible to build a White Castle,” says Production Designer Aidan Leroux. Not only did White Castle become an enthusiastic supporter of the film, they contributed a truckload of real White Castle supplies. “It worked out quite well,” says Leroux. “People were driving up trying to order hamburgers the whole time we were there!”

As it would be a big challenge to furnish the set of the Halaby home in a realistic fashion without bringing in props from far away, the production sought out Arab families in Winnipeg. As luck would have it, they found a Palestinian family from Ramallah with three daughters who were close in age to the daughters in the script. “They had decorated their house and brought in curtains and everything from Ramallah, which would have been expensive for us to do,” says Leroux. “So it was ideal. They were completely accommodating, and it really helped us get the nuances right.”

“It was important for me in this movie to create a sense of intimacy and authenticity,” says Dabis. “I want people to walk out of the theater feeling like they know us, like they’d just celebrated the culture with us. I want them to walk out feeling a certain amount of familiarity, like ‘We too are

immigrants, we too have the same challenges, the same funny and strange experiences, and we've gone through so many of the same things.' And ultimately I'd like for people to walk away with an idea that there are all kinds of Middle Eastern people, that while everybody is different, we are all the same in many ways."

In Amerrika, Muna and Fadi flee a life of hardship in Ramallah for the dream of a new life in America, only to encounter obstacles that are more challenging. "They're trading one set of problems for another," says Dabis. "America is better, or different, in some ways, but there's still not that sense of home or of belonging that we all seek. But I didn't want to end the film on such a depressing note. Rather, I wanted to show that ultimately home is wherever we choose to make it: home is family; home is the familiar voice of our mothers on the other end of the telephone. I wanted the film to end with the sense that Muna would do whatever she had to do to create a sense of home for both herself and her son. Because for a lot of us, home has to be whatever and wherever we want it to be."

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## About the Cast

### **NISREEN FAOUR (Muna Farah)**

Actress/Director Nisreen Faour was born in the village of Tarshiha and traveled to the U.S. to study arts and performance at the age of 16. Since then, she has gained expertise in theatre, cinema and on television. On stage, she has performed in more than 15 plays for adults and children, at theatres all over the world. She played in Sarhan and the Seniorita, which won the Best Acting award at the Monodrama Festival in 1996; Nono colors from the deaf theater, which won first place in the Public Stage Festival in 2002; Don Kichote for Haifa international festival; Albab Alaali by the European Union production, written by the Jordanian writer Hisham Yanis; and Happy Woman by DarioFu and Franka Rama, produced by the national Palestinian theater and directed by Kamel al Basha.



Her first film was In the Eighth Month with director Ali Nassar. This was shown in the largest theaters both domestically and abroad in Los Angeles; Paris; Carthage, Tunisia; Iran; and at the Nazareth Film Festival, where she received a Medal of Excellence for her distinguished work. Her second film as a leading actress is Jamr Alhikaya (Whispering Embers). On television, her first roles were in the series Family Deluxe and Mishwar Al-Joma. A documentary film directed by Iraqi artist/director Mohammed Tawfiq features some stories about Nisreen's life.

Faour practiced drama mentoring in schools and with foundations for people with special needs, and she took part in preparing women groups for plays. She recently finished her studies in theater directing at Haifa University. She directed and acted in the play The Princess That Hates



Men, and directed Tolstoy's Anna Karenina, which won an award in the Akko Festival in 2006.

For the past two years, Faour has focused on accomplishing her dream of increasing awareness of quality of life and the state of the environment by being a yoga teacher and Deksha giver, which she studied at The Oneness University in India. Faour is also the head of a non-official organization called "NoWar."

### **MELKAR MUALLEM (Fadi Farah)**

Born in Jerusalem in 1993, Melkar Muallem is a talented young man who has been participating in drama workshops and playing in various productions since he was eight years old. At the age of 12, he won the Best Young Actor award at a children's festival in Ramallah, Palestine. In 2008 he won a three-year spot at MEET, an MIT University program, for young people in computer science and business studies. Amerrika is his first movie.

### **HIAM ABBASS (Raghda Halaby)**

Hiam Abbass was acclaimed for her performance opposite Academy Award nominee Richard Jenkins in Thomas McCarthy's The Visitor. She was born in Nazareth, but it was after moving to Paris that she began her acting career in movies.



Her feature films have since included Rashid Masharawi's Haifa; Ahmed Boulane's Ali, Rabiaa et les autres; Didier Bivel's Fais-moi des vacances; Raja Amari's Satin rouge; Hany Abu-Assad's Academy Award-nominated Paradise Now; Amos Gitai's Free Zone and Disengagement; Steven Spielberg's Munich; and Catherine Hardwicke's The Nativity Story. Additionally, on Alejandro González Iñárritu's Babel as well as Munich and The Nativity

Story, she worked as creative consultant and acting coach to child and/or first-time actors. Abbass has performed for director Eran Riklis in two films: The Syrian Bride and Lemon Tree, the latter winning the Audience Award at the Berlin Film Festival and winning numerous acting awards for Abbass, including a European Film Award nomination for Best Actress and an Israeli Film Academy Award for Best Actress.

Abbass next begins work on Julian Schnabel's Miral, starring in the lead role of real-life heroine Hind Hussein.

### **ALIA SHAWKAT (Salma Halaby)**

Success arrived early for Alia Shawkat. Her career began at the age of 11 when she landed a role on the ABC Family series State of Grace. However, she is best known for her role as Maeby Funke on Fox's Emmy award-winning Arrested Development, where she portrayed a rebellious and mischievous member of a dysfunctional Orange County family trying to adjust to their loss of wealth.

Most recently Shawkat was seen opposite William H. Macy and Cheryl Hines in the high school comedy *Bart Got a Room*, which premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival in April. Shawkat can be seen in *Whip It*, a dramedy from first-time director Drew Barrymore about a misfit teenager who discovers herself through joining a roller derby league. She stars alongside Ellen Page as Pash, the funny and charming best friend of Bliss (Page) who helps keep her in check.

Shawkat's additional film credits include *Prom Wars*; *Rebound* opposite Martin Lawrence; the ensemble family comedy *Deck the Halls* with Matthew Broderick, Danny DeVito and Kristin Chenoweth; *Three Kings* opposite George Clooney; and the supporting lead in Ron Pearlman's *Trail of Old Drum*.

In addition to her bustling film career, Shawkat has many new projects lined up for the small screen. She recently wrapped production opposite Megan Mullally and Alicia Silverstone on the ABC pilot *Bad Mothers Handbook* about a 30-something-year-old woman trying to raise her teenage daughter while also taking care of her mother. Shawkat can also be seen in a recurring role on USA Network's breakout hit series *Starter Wife*, playing a troubled teen who befriends Molly (Debra Messing) and Joan (Judy Davis) at a rehab facility. Additional television credits include a starring role in the Lifetime original movie *Not Like Everyone Else* and guest-starring roles on *Veronica Mars*, *JAG*, *Without a Trace*, *Boomtown* and *Presidio Med*.

#### **YUSSEF ABU WARDA (Nabeel Halaby)**

Yussef Abu Warda is a theatre actor from Haifa. He has been in numerous musical theatre productions performing in both Hebrew and Arabic, in theatres in Haifa, Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.

In 2002 he was nominated by the Israeli Film Academy for the Best Supporting Actor in the film *Kedma*, about immigrants from across Europe arriving in Palestine in 1948 shortly before the creation of the state of Israel. He also starred in the political drama *Disengagement* in 2007 and in several television series and programs.



## About the Filmmakers

### **CHERIEN DABIS (Director/Writer/Executive Producer)**

Named one of Variety's "Ten Directors to Watch" in 2009, award-winning independent filmmaker Cherien Dabis makes her feature writing and directorial debut with *Amerrika*, which premiered to both audience and critical acclaim in U.S. Dramatic Competition at the 2009 Sundance Film Festival. The film went on to open the Museum of Modern Art and Film Society of Lincoln Center's annual New Director's/New Films series in New York and will have its international premiere at the prestigious Cannes Film Festival's Director's Fortnight in May.

Dabis's original script was selected to participate in the 2005 Sundance Middle East Screenwriter's Lab, IFP/LA Director's Lab, Los Angeles Film Festival's Fast Track program and 2007 Berlinale Co-Production Market. At Tribeca All Access in 2007, Dabis was honored with the first ever L'Oréal Paris Women of Worth Vision Award, and last year she won the Renew Media/Tribeca Film Institute's Media Artist Fellowship, founded by the Rockefeller Foundation.

Also a television writer and co-producer, Dabis worked on Showtime Network's ground-breaking, original hit series *The L Word* for three seasons.

A graduate of Columbia University's Masters of Fine Arts film program, she has written, directed and produced several short films, which have screened at some of the world's top film festivals. *Make A Wish* (2006) premiered at the 2007 Sundance Film Festival, Berlin International Film Festival and Clermont-Ferrand Short Film Festival where it won the Prix de la Presse and Mention Spéciale du Jury. The film went on to win top awards in Dubai, Rotterdam, Cairo, Chicago and Aspen. Dabis received several generous grants in support of the film, including the National Geographic's All Roads Film Project Seed Grant, the Jerome Foundation's New York City Media Arts Grant and the New York State Council on the Art's Electronic Media and Film Distribution Grant. She is the recipient of an Artist Fellowship in Playwriting/Screenwriting from New York Foundation for the Arts.

As a graduate film student, Dabis was granted several distinguished awards, including the Zaki Gordon Award for Excellence in Screenwriting, the Institute for Humane Studies Film and Fiction Scholarship and the New York Women in Film and Television Scholarship.

The first of her family born in the U.S., Dabis was raised in Ohio and Jordan and currently resides in New York City.

### **CHRISTINA PIOVESAN (Producer)**

Christina Piovesan founded First Generation Films in 2007. Committed to producing quality film

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and television projects, FGF recently completed the feature film *Amerrika*. Written and directed by Cherien Dabis, *Amerrika* premiered in U.S. Dramatic Competition at the Sundance Film Festival in 2009, was selected as the opening night film for New Directors/New Films and will screen at the Director's Fortnight at Cannes.

Piovesan's other projects include *The Whistleblower*, a true-life drama set up at HBO Films; an adaptation of Robert Hough's acclaimed novel *The Stowaway*; and a teenage drama titled *White & Rice*, which recently won an honorable mention for Best Screenplay at the Tribeca Film Festival.

Prior to starting her own company, Piovesan worked for Telefilm Canada, where she oversaw production on the 2006 TIFF comedy *Young People F@#king* and Bruce McDonald's experimental film *Tracey Fragments* starring Ellen Page, as well as dozens of projects in development.

Piovesan earned a master's degree from the University of Southern California, where she won a student Emmy Award for her work on the short film *Miracle Mile*. She holds a Bachelor of Arts from McGill University and is a member of the Academy of Television Arts & Science and IFP New York.

#### **PAUL BARKIN (Producer)**

A graduate of the Canadian Film Centre and champion of director driven films, Paul Barkin has produced for some of Canada's most talented directors through his company Alcina Pictures. Selected credits include *Night of the Living* by Andrew Currie (*Fido*); *Apartment Hunting* by Bill Robertson; *Kardia* by Su Rynard, recipient of the Alfred P. Sloan Film Prize at the 2005 Hamptons International Film Festival; and the critically acclaimed, award-winning *The Tracey Fragments* by Bruce McDonald and starring Oscar® nominee Ellen Page.

In addition to *Amerrika*, which is co-produced with Buffalo Gal Pictures and written/directed by New York-based Palestinian filmmaker Cherien Dabis, Barkin's upcoming projects include the comedy *The Con Artist*, directed by Risa Bramon Garcia (*200 Cigarettes*), and *The Colony*, a sci-fi horror directed by Jeff Renfroe (*Civic Duty*, *One Point 0*).

#### **LIZ JARVIS (Co-Producer)**

Liz Jarvis joined Buffalo Gal Pictures in 1995. As producer, production executive and assistant director, she has been instrumental in building alliances with national and international producers to create a wide range of award-winning feature films, documentaries and short dramas.

Jarvis developed and produced her first feature film, *Seven Times Lucky*, with writer/director Gary Yates in 2004. Subsequent feature film credits include *The Stone Angel*, an adaptation of the acclaimed Margaret Laurence novel, produced with writer/director Kari Skogland and starring Ellen Burstyn and Christine Horne; and *High Life*, co-produced with Triptych Media and director Gary Yates, and starring Timothy Olyphant, Steve McIntyre, Joe Anderson and Rossif Sutherland.

#### **AL-ZAIN AL-SABAH (Co-Producer)**

Al-Zain Al-Sabah founded Eagle Vision Media Group in 2007. Serving as chairman and managing director of the Group, she has produced a wide range of award-winning documentaries, short films, commercials and TV shows. Today, EVMG is a fully integrated production company, specializing in the development of quality media projects for film and television. The company

supports culturally relevant projects and, as such, provides a creative and financial haven for regional filmmakers.

Al-Sabah holds a master's degree from the University of Southern California's School of Cinema, and a bachelor's degree in journalism from Boston University.

### **TOBIAS DATUM (Director of Photography)**

Tobias Datum was born in Frankfurt, Germany, and lives in Los Angeles. After attending film school in Berlin and AFI, he started shooting numerous films including *How The Garcia Girls Spent Their Summer* that competed at Sundance in 2005 and was released by Maya Releasing; and *Drama/Mex*, which premiered at Cannes in 2006, *Semaine de la Critique*, and Toronto Film Festivals, and was distributed by IFC. Datum shot the pilot and three seasons for *South of Nowhere*, a single camera show on The N Network. *Mommas Man*, which he shot in 2007, premiered in *American Spectrum* at the 2008 Sundance Film Festival and was picked up by Kino International. Another film shot in 2007, *Voy a Explotar*, premiered in Venice in 2008 and received its North American premiere in Toronto.

### **AIDAN LEROUX (Production Designer)**

Aidan Leroux was born in London, England, and later moved to Toronto where he received a B.A. in philosophy and literature, and a Bachelor of Architecture from the University of Toronto. Other degrees include a Graduate Design Diploma from the Architectural Association in London and a Master of Science from Columbia University. His first feature-length project as a production designer, *Stormy Weather: The Music of Harold Arlen*, won a Gemini Award for Best Production Design. In 2006 Leroux was nominated for two DGC Awards for *Shaftesbury Film's Booky Makes Her Mark*. Recent projects include the Lee Daniels feature *Tennessee*.

### **KEITH REAMER (Editor)**

Born in southern New Jersey, Keith Reamer fell in love with the movies at an early age, making Super 8mm horror films in his parent's backyard before deciding, at age 14, to become a film editor. In 1982, Keith graduated from the University of Bridgeport's late, storied film program and soon went to work as a New York-based film editor.

Among his credits are Maggie Greenwald's revisionist western, *The Ballad of Little Jo*, Mary Haron's feature debut, *I Shot Andy Warhol*, and Tony Bui's *Three Seasons*, the first American dramatic feature to shoot in Vietnam. Other credits include Maggie Greenwald's *Songcatcher*, Eric Bross's *Restaurant*, John Gray's *Martin and Lewis* for CBS, and Hilary Brougher's *Stephanie Daley*. Reamer recently finished editing his first feature documentary, a portrait of the notorious NY sex club *Platos Retreat*, *American Swing*, directed by Jon Hart and Mathew Kaufman. The film premiered at this year's Toronto Film Festival. *Amerrika* is Reamer's 35th feature film.

### **KAREEM ROUSTOM (Composer)**

Kareem Roustom is an award-winning composer who has composed music for film, television, the concert hall and album projects. Steeped in the musical traditions of the Arab Near East and trained in Western music, Roustom is a musically bilingual composer who has collaborated with a wide variety of artists ranging from the Philadelphia Orchestra to Shakira. An active composer of film music, Roustom has scored a number of short and feature-length films, and his score for the award-winning documentary *Encounter Point* earned him the Best Musical Score Award at the

2006 Bend International Film Festival.

As a concert composer, Roustom has been commissioned by the Philadelphia Orchestra, Intercultural Journeys, the Boston Children's Chorus, the Damascus Festival Chamber Ensemble and others. Roustom's concert music arrangements have also been performed by the Zurich Chamber Orchestra, the Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra, the Philadelphia Sinfonia, members of the Staatskapelle Berlin Orchestra and others.

His work in pop music includes the string arrangement for the Shakira and Beyonce duet "Beautiful Liar." The song became the fastest rising single in Billboard history and was nominated for a 2008 Grammy Award and has since gone platinum. Roustom also wrote a string arrangement for Shakira's duet performance of "Hips Don't Lie" with Wyclef Jean at the 2007 Grammy Awards as well as recent arrangements for Shakira's forthcoming album. An active performer on the Oud (Arabic lute), Roustom has performed classical Arabic music in the U.S., Canada and Europe in such venues as the Kennedy Center, Royce Hall, the United Nations, Place Des Arts in Montreal and a live performance on Radio France with the renowned early music group The Boston Camerata.

Roustom has recorded and or produced for Epic Records, Warner Brothers Classics, Fuller Street Music, Xauen Music and others. His awards include the Pete Carpenter Fellowship from the BMI Foundation and grants from the American Composers Forum.

#### **DOUG BERNHEIM (Music Supervisor)**

Based in New York City, Doug Bernheim has music supervised over 30 feature films, including the 2007 Academy Award-nominated film Half Nelson (starring Ryan Gosling), the 2006 Academy Award-nominated film Transamerica (starring Felicity Huffman) and the 2008 Golden Globe-nominated film Grace is Gone (starring John Cusack). Bernheim also co-created and co-produced the popular music compilation series "Christmas Remixed", featuring modern electronic remixes of vintage holiday recordings by Louis Armstrong, Ella Fitzgerald, Bing Crosby, Dean Martin, Nat King Cole and other legendary artists. In addition to his music work, Bernheim has been a producer on several feature films including Winter Solstice (starring Anthony LaPaglia, Allison Janney, Michelle Monaghan and Ron Livingston), The Assassination of Richard Nixon (starring Sean Penn, Naomi Watts and Don Cheadle), Live Free or Die (starring Aaron Stanford, Paul Schneider and Zooey Deschanel), and Pretty Bird (starring Billy Crudup and Paul Giamatti).

#### **LEVANTINE ENTERTAINMENT (Executive Producer)**

Levantine Entertainment was formed in 2008 by Crest Investments to develop and produce character-driven films that explore multicultural experiences between the U.S. and the Middle East.

#### **NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC ENTERTAINMENT (Distributor)**

National Geographic Entertainment includes National Geographic Films (which co-presented the 2005 Academy Award-winning March of the Penguins and the 2004 Oscar-nominated film The Story of the Weeping Camel, and National Geographic Cinema Ventures (NGCV), which released both domestically and internationally the 3-D concert film U2 3D in 2008 to critical acclaim. NGCV set giant-screen box-office records with Mysteries of Egypt, and recently with Sea Monsters: A Prehistoric Adventure.

Adam Leipzig is president of National Geographic Films, Lisa Truitt is president of NGCV and Mark Katz is president of distribution NGCV.

National Geographic Entertainment combines into a single operating group National Geographic's Cinema Ventures, Films, Kids Entertainment, Home Entertainment and Music & Radio. NGE is part of National Geographic Global Media, bringing together all of National Geographic's editorial platforms in order to streamline collaboration and further support the Society's mission. Founded in 1888 to "increase and diffuse geographic knowledge," National Geographic works to inspire people to care about the planet. It reaches more than 360 million people worldwide each month through magazines, books, digital media, and television, radio, music and film. It funds more than 250 scientific research, exploration and conservation projects each year and supports an education program combating geography illiteracy.

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