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New York Arab and South Asian Film Festival (NYASAFF) March 5 - 16

Thu Feb 21, 2008 8:00am EST

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NEW YORK, Feb. 21 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- Alwan for the Arts presents the 2008 New York Arab and South Asian Film Festival including over 50 feature premieres, documentaries and short films from 25 countries in North Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, Europe, and North America.

Festival Dates: March 5 - 16, 2008

Venues: Tribeca Cinemas, Columbia University, Art in General, Cantor Film Center at NYU, and Two Boots Pioneer Theatre

"I was asked recently to explain the commonality among the films we'll be screening," recounted Alwan Director and NYASAFF Assistant Director, Ahmed Issawi. "Contextually, all of the films represent the visions and voices of filmmakers whose national identity is rooted in the geographical areas the festival represents. However, the diversity and cultural fusions among those voices exceeds any specific geography and ultimately reflects the reality of how complex our identities continue to become in this global age."

The 2008 NYASAFF will expand its reach and impact this year by offering a variety of events for audiences to engage with filmmakers, actors, academics and celebrity festival supporters through intimate Q & As, retrospectives, panel discussions and networking events including a Gala Reception honoring Emmy and SAG award winning Actor, Tony Shalhoub, who stars in the feature film AmericanEast, which will have its NYC premiere at the festival on March 15. Other Gala honorees include Tunisian film star, Anissa Daoud; Egyptian Filmmaker, Hala Khalil; Tunisian Writer/Director, Jilani Saadi; and L.A. based Film Producer, Malek Akkad.

"These filmmakers are forging both new film language and style, and at the same time, bringing nuanced and sensitive depictions of both everyday life and extraordinarily creative visions from these regions," commented Festival Director, Prerana Reddy. "One of the things that makes this festival so interesting to curate is that it doesn't matter how diverse or controversial the issues reflected in the films, the New York film community, and its audiences are truly a microcosm of the world and are eager to engage in a kind of collaboration with the festival."

New York filmmaker, Abel Ferrara, commented on his interest in and support of the festival, "Nothing is really foreign in New York. We're already talking about the world everyday with all kinds of people. This festival is the kind of thing that improves the conversation."

2008 NYASAFF Highlights and Themes

-- "Representations of Sexuality and Gender-bending in Arab Cinema" is a provocative thematic program by guest curator Joseph Massad, Associate Professor of Modern Arab Politics and Intellectual History at Columbia University. Massad's recent book, *Desiring Arabs*, traces the history of intellectual debate concerned with Arab sexuality and its portrayal.

-- Sexual Desire is a theme reflected throughout the festival in stories of love and attraction marked by racial and class tension, war, religious restrictions, and the hardships of migration.

-- "Retrospective on Indian Director Murali Nair" includes:

Throne of Death, which won the prestigious Camera d'Or Award at the Cannes International Film Festival in 1999.

Nair's 2003 release, *A Story That Begins at the End*, which has received international acclaim.

The NY premiere of Nair's recent work, *Unni, Another Story of an Indian Child*.

Murali Nair will also teach a Master's film course at Columbia University

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