

Press Release

Qumra 2022 nurtures series from the Arab world for a global audience

- Filmmakers with series under development say DFI's support has established a hub in Qatar for all forms of cinematic art

Doha, Qatar; March 20, 2022: Five emerging talents with series projects in development applauded Qumra 2022, the annual talent incubator event of the Doha Film Institute (DFI), for reinforcing a strong foundation for series from the Arab world for global audiences.

This edition of Qumra is nurturing six series for multiple platforms, including video on demand and other streaming services. The selection of series reflects the continued evolution of Qumra to expand support in parallel with the latest trends in cinematic entertainment, in particular, with the growing demand for series.

Addressing the media on the first day of Qumra 2022, filmmakers were unanimous in their view that the series format helps ensure a wider reach for stories from the Arab world to global audiences.

Aisha Al-Jaidah and Kholoud Al Ali put the spotlight on Qatar and its lost local lullabies through their series, **Traditional Qatari Songs** (Qatar). Traditional children's songs in Qatar are fading away, and this project preserves such songs while integrating them with new beats that appeal to modern kids using the same colourful animation they adore and love.

They state in their director's note: "We grew up listening to the recitations of our grandparents through our childhood, which still remains in our memories. Today with easy access to all the media platforms, it is very competitive to stay up to date with the latest trend and meet the standard of quality kid's demand. This is why we would like to represent our traditional Qatari songs in a more contemporary way that appeals to today's kids."

They have compiled 13 lullabies including seasonal songs and those related to different occasions. They said the Doha Film Institute has provided excellent support in nurturing the series, as it had done for their earlier short films.

Meedo Taha, a Lebanese filmmaker and author interested in characters who dare to push social boundaries, said the support of DFI to his series project, **Why Did the Bluesman Cross the Road?** (USA, Qatar) is a testament to how far Qumra has gone in promoting international projects. "My series has two parts: One, how the public view Arab immigrants in the US, and two, how Arabs carry their culture no matter where they are."

Why Did the Bluesman Cross the Road? is a horror musical melodrama in which a pair of Latin-Arab mechanics and the boss's daughter escape the garage in search of freedom, love, and music. The film explores the social and psychological struggles of the immigrant artist in a deeply divided America in search of its own identity.

Writer-director Areej Mahmoud's project ***Under This Roof*** (Lebanon, Qatar) presents a compelling premise – that of a frail, yet strong-willed, seventy-year-old woman, who tries to assassinate a presidential candidate and fails. Her story is intertwined with the stories of a journalist who sacrifices her career to bring out Samiya's truth. Mahmoud said the incredible support by the Institute shows how Qatar is leading the great hubs all over the world to empower new cinematic voices. "My project is about our experiences as people from Lebanon and how they form a shared experience with the rest of the world. With the world becoming more and more riddled with problems, I believe that our experiences can speak to people in many different places."

Mo Yusuf, the director of ***Out of My Mind*** (Qatar, Somalia, Djibouti) underlined the need to be authentic in storytelling, adding that his project reflects his own ambitions and inner transformation. He said it is important to write not without thought of audiences or other considerations. He said he has learnt to view things from a subliminal level, which has helped him as a filmmaker.

His project is a comedy series about a struggling Somali writer living in Dubai who decides to become the stand-up comedian he always wanted to be. But he must first forgo his writing career, racist clients that keep the lights on, a couple of friends and family members, as well as his own inadequacies.

Lina Lamara, a Franco-Algerian screenwriter and director, said her series, ***Day Off*** (France, Morocco, Qatar) follows different characters in different cities, including in Doha. "It is about how they find happiness during their day off, and explores the possibility of a day off being a break between what the society expects us to do and what we want to be. Off days a dream space where everything is possible; and it is important to safeguard them. The message of the series is about freedom. By setting the first two episodes in Doha, it serves as a window on the country but also connects with people all over the world. My goal is to gather everyone through the show."

Highlighting that series helps connect with a global audience, Yossera Bouchtia, the director of ***Yasmine/Jasmine*** (Morocco, USA) said her series is a "real immigrant story; it is about the significance of connecting with one's roots and one's transformation. In that sense, it is really a universal story because many people grapple with the question of belonging."

Her one-hour limited series centres on Jasmine, a first-generation immigrant who suffers from inexpressible existential grief related to her distant homeland of North Africa. Jasmine falls into a deep state of shock after her mother unexpectedly dies, which subsequently triggers intense and horrifying visions of a doppelgänger ghost named Yasmine, who grows relentless at disrupting Jasmine's American life.

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