

# The Main Feature



Season 35 - Issue 4 (screening 23.10.14)



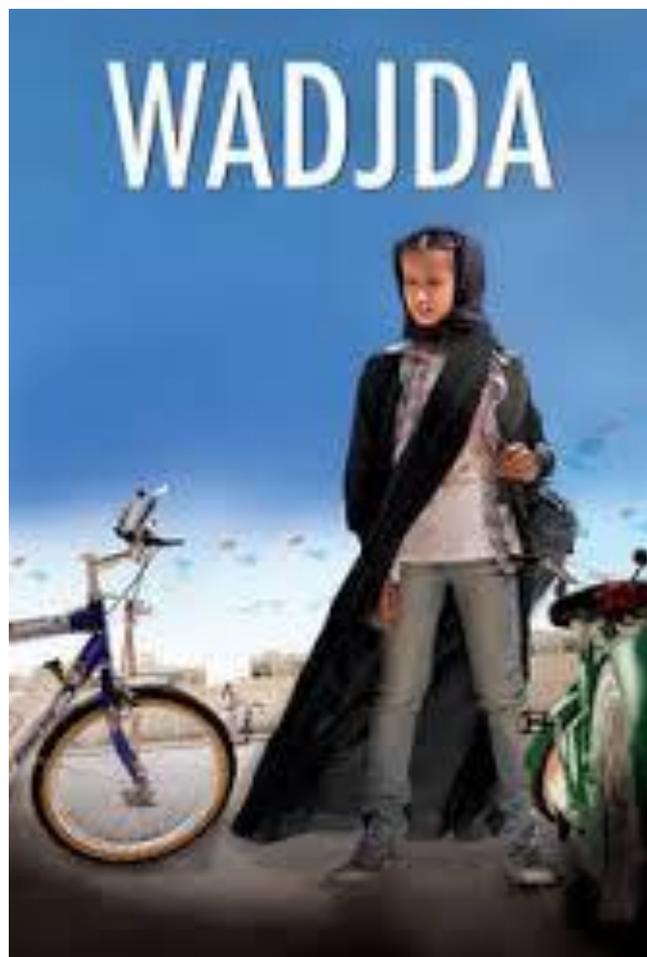
One World Week is a Development Education Charity. Each year, "The Week" is an opportunity for people from diverse backgrounds to come together to learn about global justice, to spread that learning and to use it to take action for justice locally and globally.

**"Living Differently"** is the theme for One World Week 2014. It leads on from last year's theme about consumption.

It recognises that we need to make changes now to secure a fairer, more satisfying, life for us all and one that protects the planet's resources for future generations.

Our subtitle **"Breaking chains - making change"** is inspired by Nelson Mandela's words: ***"... to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others"***.

*WNCC's marks  
One World  
Week by  
screening:*



Saudi Arabia/Germany

Cert PG

Running time 97 mins

UK release date 19 July 2013

**Directed and Screenplay by** Haifaa al-Mansour

**Edited by** Andreas Wodraschke

**Cinematography** Lutz Reitemeier

**Music by** Max Richter

### Starring

Reem Abdullah as Mother

Abdullrahman Algohani as Abdullah

Ahd Kamel as Ms Hussa

Noof Saad as Qu'ran Teacher

Alanoud Sajini as Fatin

Waad Mohammed as Wadjda (وَدَجْدَا)

Sultan Al Assaf as Father

Ibrahim Al Mozael as Toyshop Owner

Rafa Al Sanea as Fatima

The production of *Wadjda* is a fascinating story as the film is the first by a female Saudi director, and was made under incredibly difficult circumstances.

The film certainly contains a strong statement about women's rights in Saudi Arabia and a hopeful message about the future, but it is not a political polemic, it's also not a humourless issue film or anything of the sort.

Rather it is an incredibly universal story expertly told.

According to the director it took five years to make *Wadjda*. She spent most of the time trying to find financial backing and getting filming permission, since she insisted on filming in Saudi Arabia for reasons of authenticity. She received backing from Rotana, the film production company of Prince Alwaleed bin Talal. However, she very much wanted to find a foreign co-producer because "in Saudi there are no movie theatres, there is no film industry to speak of and, therefore, little money for investment". After her selection for a Sundance Institute writer's lab in Jordan, al-Mansour got in touch with the German production company Razor Film, which had previously produced films with Middle-Eastern topics (*Paradise Now* and *Waltz with Bashir* both of which WNCC have previously screened)

Al-Mansour says that the original version of her screenplay was much bleaker than the finished product: "I decided I didn't want the film to carry a slogan and scream, but just to create a story where people can laugh and cry a little." She based the character of Wadjda on one of her nieces and also on her own experiences when growing up. The main themes of the story are freedom, as represented by the bicycle, and the fear of emotional abandonment, as Wadjda's father wants to take a second wife who will provide him with a son.

*Wadjda* was filmed on the streets of Riyadh, which often made it necessary for the director to work from the back of a van, as she could not publicly mix with the men in the crew. Often, she could only communicate via walkie-talkie and had to watch the actors on a monitor. This made it difficult to direct: "It made me realise the need to rehearse and to develop an understanding for each scene before we shot it."



The first-time actress wasn't easy to find. Saudi Arabia has a negligible film industry – its cinemas were closed during the Islamic resurgence of the 80s – and no casting agencies worthy of the name. So Haifa used word of mouth and waited for the amateurs to roll up.

"Waad came in with jeans and trainers, listening to Justin Bieber," she recalls. "And then she had this amazing voice. And she sang Justin Bieber, she knows the words by heart even though she doesn't understand them. The first week she just learned how to stand by her mark and then she blossomed. She naturally has it."

Just as Waad Mohammad is an unorthodox star, Haifa, 38, could scarcely be further from the alpha image of the stereotypical film director. Soft-spoken and standing just a few inches over five feet, she admits she struggled when she first left her remote Saudi home to study English at the American University in Cairo: "It was a disaster. It was direct interaction with the rest of the world and I come from a very shy culture."



She's one of 12 children born to Saudi poet Abdul Rahman Mansour, who used endless movies on VHS to keep his huge brood entertained. Hollywood and Jackie Chan were favourites – not obvious sources of inspiration for this distinctly realist director, but they instilled in her the value of a happy ending.

"I wasn't trying to [wash Saudi's dirty laundry], I was trying to put a human face on the culture. I wanted to show human resilience. Saudi's a harsh place and I didn't want to make a

horrific film as people might have expected. I wanted to make an uplifting happy film about embracing hope. I am always respectful of the culture, I work within the framework. I wasn't angry making the film."

**Q. What were the most challenging things about making Wadjda?**

A. Of course, the culture. We had permission to shoot but when you actually try to start filming, ordinary people don't understand film and it makes them nervous. A lot of the neighbourhoods in Saudi are very conservative, they don't want cameras around and they would chase us out. But other places were very good about it. Also, the country is very segregated [for men and women]. I could not be outside with the actors, I had to be in a van using a walkie-talkie to direct, because men and women are not supposed to mix in the workplace, especially in public. We were going against the trend.

**Q. Since you made Wadjda in 2012, rules in Saudi Arabia have been slightly relaxed to allow women to ride bikes, although only in parks and when accompanied by a male guardian...**

A. Yes, that's great, right? We should be happy that changes like this are taking place. I know they seem like they are small and they don't mean much, but it shows that attitudes towards women are changing, and women are getting more liberties, even if it is very slowly. There is still a long, long way to go, but hopefully things like this pave the way for bigger changes.



**Q. Do you think your film has helped change attitudes?**

A. Of course. I think though film and arts may not have direct impact, they create an atmosphere. I want the arts [in Saudi] to create an atmosphere of tolerance, that is what it's for.

She pointed to signs of change in Saudi society and said younger generations were challenging rigid customs and slowly pushing the boundaries of what is considered acceptable. Under King Abdullah, the Saudi government has pushed for women to have better education and work opportunities and allowed them to vote in future municipal elections, the only public polls held in the kingdom.

"It's opening up, there is a huge opportunity for women now," Al Mansour said, noting that Saudi Arabia entered female athletes for the first time ever at the London Olympics.

"It is not like before, although I can't say it's like heaven. Society won't just accept it, people will put pressure on women to stay home, but we have to fight."

This is a film to be admired for both its on-screen and off-screen story. Rather than making a grand political statement, the film excels in its quieter and more intimate moments. There are important films and there are good films, and the two do not necessarily always overlap. Wadjda is both important and very, very good.

Iain McGlashan

*The printing of the notes for each film is undertaken by Repropoint free of charge*



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sponsors photocopying of *the main feature*

# Reactions to **Behind the Candelabra**

9 October 2014

<b>Score</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Votes</b>	~	1	1	4	2	7	11	8	1	1

**Total received – 36      Average Score – 6.47**

## Your Comments

Too much of a good thing is indeed wonderful.      Just wonderful.  
 Rather explicit but brilliant acting by Michael Douglas      Brilliant acting  
 More than a tad blingy. Good acting      Sorry, not my sort of film.  
 Decadent but sad – Douglas’s acting was brilliant!      Just wonderful  
 Excellent acting by Douglas and Damon      What wonderful acting!!  
 Camp as a row of tents- fabulous darling!      Not my type of film, but well acted.  
 Was not comfortable with film, but Michael Douglas was excellent.  
 Remarkable performance by Michael Douglas, pretty good by Matt Damon too.  
 Well made, excellent acting particularly Michael Douglas and Matt Damon.  
 Acting by Douglas and Damon very good, but felt no sympathy or empathy with characters  
 Very enjoyable and great to see a different genre of film. Both leads were superb  
 Extraordinary portrayal of an extraordinary character. Very well directed and acted.  
 Fancy missing England v San Marino for this  
 I missed this film in the cinema. Thanks for showing it. The two leads were excellent:  
 “Too much of a good thing is not wonderful”.

Position	Film	Average Score
1 <sup>st</sup>	Saving Mr Banks	7.78
2 <sup>nd</sup>	A Royal Affair	7.76
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Behind the Candelabra	6.47

*Our next film will mark Remembrance Week*

**8pm on Thursday 13 November 2014**



This classic early talkie remains one of the most powerful anti-war statements ever put on film and 100 years since the start of World War I is a movie of timeless relevance.