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BLESSED BENEFIT



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BLESSED BENEFIT

COMEDY - DRAMA / GERMANY - JORDAN - NETHERLANDS - QATAR / 2016 / RUNNING TIME 83 MIN / FORMAT 2K DCP
ORIGINAL TITLE: INSHALLAH ISTAFADIT

CAST

Ahmad Thaher	Ahmad
Maher Khammash	El Mor
Odai Hijazi	Abu Wafa / Ahmad's cousin
Nadeem Rimawi	Deadman
Mahamoud al Massad	Ibrahim
Fayez Salman el Huwaiti	Policeman Salem
Omar el Natshe	Jaloul
Soliman el Hajaya	Prison Sergeant
Nadim Mushahwar	El Bis

CREW

Writer & Director	Mahmoud al Massad
Director of Photography	Giorgos Mihelis
Producer	Thanassis Karathanos
	Dima Hamdallah
	Julius Ponten
	Mahmoud al Massad
	Nart Amer Souber
	Zeina Soufan
Casting Director	Mahmoud Karajoghly
Costumes Designer	Mahmoud al Massad
Makeup Artist	Wouter Van Lujin
Editors	Simon El Habre
	Petar Markovic
	Matthaios Voulgaris
Line Producer	Johannes Doberenz
Sound	Martin Frühmorgen
Sound Design	Andre Matthias
Music	

BLESSED BENEFIT



LOGLINE

Ahmad gets tangled up in an unfortunate business deal that lands him in prison. But life in prison might not be that bad...

SYNOPSIS

Ahmad, a construction worker gets tangled up in an unfortunate business deal leading him to prison. He meets fraudster Ibrahim, who ruins his last hope to prove his innocence. Ahmad is awakened by the realization that life in prison might be better than his life on the outside.

On a blazing hot day, Ahmad, a 45 year old construction worker, is arrested for using a client's down-payment to help his cousin, Abu Wafa in a deal of 10 brand new laptops hoping to make a small profit from it in a matter of three days. Due to custom procedures the imported laptops are not released in time. Unable to do the job neither pay the money back, Ahmad is sentenced to three months in prison for fraud.

On his way into the police station, Ahmad meets Ibrahim, a professional fraudster, who is on his way out of prison after a one-year sentence. While in prison, Ahmad becomes worried about his family and is desperate to find a way out as soon as possible. When Abu Wafa tells him that the laptops will be cleared from customs and his debt repaid soon, Ahmad is convinced he will get out and spend "Eid" at home with his family. When the laptops are finally released, Abu Wafa advertises them in the

newspaper for a quick sale. Ibrahim sees no better catch than this ad and manages to take the laptops. When Ahmad hears the news, he realizes that his last hope to be released is shattered. Meanwhile, his family's financial situation is only getting worse.

Where food and drink is not a worry, new friendships struck, no cell phones ringing, far away from any obligation of the outside world, day by day Ahmad feels something that he's never felt before - liberty. Half way through his sentence his biggest worry becomes losing this liberty after his release and above all, having to deal with a bigger debt. But Abu Wafa has good news, at last Ahmad will get his money back as the police arrest Ibrahim and found one laptop left from the ten. After Abu Wafa tries to recover the laptop, he discovers that Policeman Salem is temporarily holding the laptop for his personal use.

While Ahmad is transported home in a police car, Policeman Salem receives a call from his wife informing him that their house has been robbed including the laptop.

DIRECTORS NOTE BY MAHMOUD AL MASSAD

Blessed Benefit is a story about a man trying to find a better life, and finding it in the least expected place: prison. The film celebrates the creativity of the everyday struggle to pay the bills. The main characters Ahmad and Ibrahim represent two opposite sides of the spectrum: the honest man who gets put in jail and the criminal

BLESSED BENEFIT

who cheats the system professionally. They both face setbacks at every turn, but armed with jokes and pranks are determined to overcome their economic situation.

My previous film *Recycle* dealt with similar topics such as poverty and the middle-class struggle to survive in a globalizing world. "This is my picture when I was dead" was constructed as a personal portrait of a young man whose life was severely affected by the Middle East conflict. As a storyteller, my goal is to deal with major issues through a single man's perspective inside out. His story can say something meaningful about the larger context. Where my previous films were of a serious nature required by the observational documentary form, *Blessed Benefit* will be a dark comedy of a universal aspect – making a living.

When I moved back to Jordan after almost 20 years abroad, I keep getting surprised at the people's creativity in cheating in Jordan. Whenever I think I've really seen all the possible tricks of the trade, someone manages to come up with an inventive way to hustle some money. And often times the ways are so ingenious, that my admiration for its originality is even stronger than my anger. Ibrahim represents this kind of ultimate deceiver: he is charming and polite: you will never expect that he will cheat you, deceiving became genetic for him, almost like it has become part of his DNA.

Films such as *The Hunger*, *Midnight Express*, *The Shawshank Redemption*, and *The Prophet*, but if those masterpieces represent the big escape from prison, *Blessed Benefit* represents the longing to stay.

Unfortunately, our image as Middle Easterners to the world is one-sided - a dramatic stereotype. It is some-what true but the other side missing - the humor and irony- provides patience in dealing with their daily struggle.

My goal is to make something realistic and light through personal stories, but at the same time self-critical confronting issues such as corruption and unemployment. To me, *Blessed Benefit* is a unique opportunity to tell a story through an ironic approach, yet it's a major turning point in my filmmaking career.

Q&A WITH MAHMOUD AL MASSAD

How did you arrive at the idea of making a film about men in prison?

The story was inspired by a friend of mine who was sent to prison for three months for what seemed like an entirely trivial delict. I was very worried about him as I had known him for 20 years and went to visit him in prison. To my surprise he looked good and was whispering to me because he didn't want his wife to hear him and said he was really having a good time. At first, he was dismayed at being behind bars. Then, he compared his new situation to everyday life in Jordan and very quickly decided he was better off. After this I felt the urgency to make a film about the situation in Jordan and his story basically summed up the whole situation we live in locally.



BLESSED BENEFIT

Were the experiences of you main character based on true events?

Yes, 60% of the experiences in the film were based on true events and the rest we had to fictionalise to make it a complete story worth to be a motion picture.

How did you conduct your research?

First, my research came up from the daily issues me or people around me face living in Jordan, such as corruption, unemployment and poverty. More importantly, stories that Ahmad has told me he had experienced in prison and others by random prisoners.

What can we learn from this film?

You learn about the daily frustration for an honest person who is trying to make a living in the region.

BIOGRAPHY OF DIRECTOR/WRITER MAHAMOUD AL MASSAD

Mahmoud al Massad, a Jordanian filmmaker, has received international acclaim for his documentaries SHATTER HASSAN, RECYCLE and THIS IS MY PICTURE WHEN I WAS DEAD, reaching large international audiences. Both feature films RECYCLE and THIS IS MY PICTURE were internationally financed and received support from the Sundance Documentary Institute. RECYCLE was awarded with the World Cinema Cinematography award at Sundance 2008 and screened at over 70 international film festivals. It was theatrically released in several European countries and sold to ITVS Independent Lens (USA). THIS IS MY PICTURE WHEN I WAS DEAD (co-produced with ITVS and VPRO, supported by a Dubai Film Connection Grant) premiered at IDFA 2010 within its International Competition, and won the Best Documentary Award at Dubai International Film Festival. Al Massad was invited to the 2007 Sundance Director's Lab, attended EAVE as writer with project, and has served as a jury member on various film festivals. His current project BLESSED BENEFIT received the Abu Dhabi Film Commission Shasha Grant among more than 160 projects, won ARTE award and has been selected for the Cannes Film Festival's program L'ATELIER 2012.

Selected Filmography

- 2010 THIS IS MY PICTURE WHEN I WAS DEAD**
(documentary 80min)
director / writer / producer / cinematographer
- 2009 ORUSH & OSMAN**
(documentary, 22 min)
- 2007 RECYCLE**
(documentary, 78 min)
director / writer / producer / cinematographer
- 2006 30 METERS OF SILENCE**
(documentary, 35min)
director writer / producer

- 2002 GARE DU LYON** (8 min)
director / writer / producer
- 2002 SHATTER HASSAN**
(documentary, 45 min)
director / writer / producer
- 1999 THE MERCATOR CARTIER** (64 min)
director / writer / producer
- 1998 LOMBOK 5th OF MAY** (40 min)
director / writer / producer
- 1998 RITUAL** (12 min)
director / writer / producer
- 1998 BLOCK B** (12 min)
director / writer / producer
- 1998 HUMAN LANDSCAPE** (35 min)
director / writer / producer

BIOGRAPHY OF MAIN ACTOR AHMAD THAHER

Ahmad Thaher was born in Zarqa, Jordan. He studied Construction Engineering at Yarmouk University in Jordan which is his current job. His first appearance was in a short Jordanian film "DNA" by Mahmoud al Massad. His sense of humor enlightened the film "Recycle", his second film, about the harsh reality of life in Zarqa, and once again his real life journey through prison inspired Director Mahmoud al Massad to create his first Narrative Feature "Blessed Benefit". A story about a man in search for a better life, and he finds it in the least expected place, prison, which Ahmad will play as himself.

BLESSED BENEFIT

PRODUCED BY TWENTY TWENTY

Twenty Twenty Vision is a film production company based in Berlin, Germany. The principal Thanassis Karathanos and shareholder Uta Ganschow formed the company in December 1998 as a vehicle for the production of feature film projects aimed at the national and international markets.

Films produced & co-produced by Twenty Twenty Vision (selection):

- 2016 ELLE** (feature, Paul Verhoeven, FR-GER)
Cannes FF 2015: in Competition
- 2016 MA LOUTE** (feature, Bruno Dumont, FR-GER)
Cannes FF 2015: in Competition
- 2016 MARIUPOLIS** (documentary, Mantas Kvedaravicius, LTU-GER-FR-UKR) 66th IFF Berlin: Panorama Dokumente
- 2016 SOY NERO** (feature, Rafi Pitts, GER-FR-MEX)
66th IFF Berlin: Competition
- 2015 AN** (feature, Naomi Kawase, FR-GER-JAP)
Cannes FF 2015 - Opening film - Un Certain Regard
- 2015 WEDNESDAY 04:45** (feature, Alexis Alexiou)
Tribeca FF
- 2014 THE FAREWELL PARTY** (feature, Sharon Maymon & Tal Granit, GER-ISR), Venice Days 2014
- 2013 SEPTEMBER** (feature, Penny Panayotopoulou, GER-GRC) Karlovy Vary Film Fest 2013
- 2012 INVASION** (feature, Dito Tsintsadze, GER-AUT)
Munich Film Festival 2012
- 2010 THE HUNTER** (feature, Rafi Pitts, GER-IRN)
60th IFF Berlin: Competition
- 2009 AJAMI** (feature, Yaron Shani, Scandar Copti, GER - ISR) Oscar Nomination: Best Foreign Language Film of the Year - Academy Awards, USA 2009
- 2008 SMALL CRIME** (feature, Christos Georgiou, GER-CYP-GRC)
49th International Film Festival Thessaloniki 2008

IN CO-PRODUCTION WITH

- *ISEE FILM
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- *HABBEKRATS

WORLD SALES BETA CINEMA

World sales and co-financing company **Beta Cinema** has established itself as a "boutique-operation" for quality feature films that combine commercial viability with artistic integrity. Prime examples are Oscar winners and worldwide B.O. hits like THE LIVES OF OTHERS, IL DIVO, MONGOL and DOWNFALL.

Current highlights include the Emma Watson, Daniel Brühl, Michael Nyqvist thriller COLONIA and Sundance Grand Jury Prize winner SAND STORM.

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