



Press Release

‘Bilal’ filmmakers at Ajyal discuss the importance of research, the process of creating the first full-length animation feature in the region and establishing the first CGI animation studio

Doha, Qatar; December 5, 2015: The filmmakers behind *Bilal* spoke passionately in a wide-ranging roundtable discussion about the making of their breath-taking animated feature which had its world premiere as the closing night film at the third Ajyal Youth Festival, presented by the Doha Film Institute, Saturday night.

The film, an inspiring story of faith, hope and self-discovery inspired by the real life story of the historical warrior Bilal bin Rabah involved the creative talents from 22 countries to bring his story to the big screen.

To begin the project, a research team, including a number of forensic scientists, worked for almost two years looking back into the past to provide critical information to help structure the characters featured in *Bilal* and to recreate and bring to life their tribal nature, their physical being, their behaviour and attitudes and their appearance.

Director/producer Ayman Jamal said when casting the voice talent for the main characters they targeted the US because they wanted the actor playing Bilal “to be able to give an English and African accent and to convey the epic sense of the story inspired by real events that happened 1400 years ago.”

Jamal went on to discuss the challenges in creating the full -length animation film.

“The industry here is based on short movies and originally we wanted to work with an animation studio but we found there was no animation or CGI studio in the MENA region so we had to start the studio ourselves to make *Bilal* and that’s how we established Dubai-based Barajoun Studios.”

Financed via individual investors from Saudi Arabia, Dubai and with the support of the Doha Film Institute, the film was four years in the making as the historical story uniquely tells the life story of Bilal from the age of 6 years old to 60 years old.

Jamal explained the style of the characters was very different from other animated movies in that the filmmakers wanted to ensure the characters weren’t too cartoonish or too realistic.

The film’s co-director Khurram H. Alavi combined his scriptwriting and directing abilities and his background as a digital sculptor and character artist to create the unique nature of the characters in the film which were created from scratch with conceptual designs as the first step

“We wanted to tell the story chronologically because it was originally told in that way and so creating these characters was an extensive process as you see them develop over a number of years,” said Indian co-director Alavi.



Jacob Latimore, who voices the teenage **Bilal** in the movie, talked about the unique nature of the Ajyal Youth Film Festival where films in the line-up are voted for by youth jurors.

“It’s so unique and important to have a youth platform where we are the judges and vote for the films. It’s important for youth to have a voice in this way because youth are the future – in terms of music, film, everything.”

Icelandic composer Atil Örvarsson said that geography played a big part in creating the music for the film.

“The music needed to get into the characteristics of the region and had to combine the archaeological, historical nature of the story and make it accessible for an international audience. We used old instruments from the region and combined it with modern electronically synthesised music, we created themes for some of the characters and created a unique, other worldly sound for the witch doctor.”

After Ajyal, **Bilal** producer/director Jamal said the film will also be screened at Dubai International Film Festival and the Berlin Film Festival where they hope to be able to announce some territorial distribution deals.

“This film is a big deal for the region because its never been done before here – a full length animation film produced, shot and made here – it’s the first of its kind.”

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For more information on the movie timings and the Ajyal Youth Film Festival, visit www.dohafilminstitute.com.

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About Doha Film Institute:

Doha Film Institute is an independent, not-for-profit cultural organisation. It supports the growth of the local film community through cultivating film appreciation, enhancing industry knowledge and contributing to the development of sustainable creative industries in Qatar. The Institute’s platforms include funding and production of local, regional and international films; skills-sharing and mentorship programmes; film screenings; the Ajyal Youth Film Festival; and Qumra. With culture, community, learning and entertainment at its foundation, the Institute is committed to supporting Qatar’s 2030 vision for the development of a knowledge-based economy.

Doha Film Institute

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