

Press Release

Ajyal Jurors warm up to inspiring stories of familial bonding at the 10th Ajyal Film Festival

Doha, Qatar; October 3, 2022: An endearing story of brotherly love and the sacrifices a family makes, the story of a woman's salvation after attempting to hide a truth, and a powerful documentary about a field worker at an excavation site and his relationship with his family as they attempt to find security in uncertain times received overwhelming responses from the youth jurors of the Special Edition of the 10th Ajyal Film Festival.

In their interaction with Mahmoud Ghaffari, the director of *The Apple Day* (Iran/2022), the youngest Mohaq jurors, aged 8 to 11, impressed the filmmaker with their questions – ranging from the choice of his story to the challenges in producing the film.

Explaining that the film – a tale of kinship, brotherly love and perseverance – was shot in 20 days, Ghaffari said *The Apple Day* is a personal ode to the place he grew up. He drew his characters from children he had met and also chose for his child actor lead, a young boy who was a real-life fruit-seller on the streets of Tehran.

Ghaffari said he was inspired to become a director after watching a film crew. *The Apple Day*, he said, was made for all cross-sections of audiences, and is his commentary against societal injustices, especially how men hesitate to take responsibility and how they turn a blind eye to the needs of their children. Addressing a query about how the mother in the film takes charge and leads the family to a possible new future, he said: "The women in my country – and the region – are extremely strong. In fact, the protests in Iran now are led by women, with men supporting them."

Ali Asgari, whose two short films were nominated for Palme d'Or at Festival de Cannes, and the director of *Until Tomorrow* (Iran, France, Qatar/2022), a film supported by the DFI, engaged with Hilal jurors, aged 13 to 17, said making the film had its challenges. He was asked to cut out certain scenes, and as he insisted on having them, the film is awaiting release in Iran.

The film is about Fereshteh, a young mother facing a serious dilemma. On the surface, she is relatively happy, studying and working in a print shop in Tehran. But her parents are coming to visit, and she has kept a secret from them — her two-month-old daughter.

Asgari said the film, a portrait of the millennial generation and how they are re-examining the value system, has a core message: "It is about personal salvation, about how a woman discovers reserves of courage within her to stop hiding a truth." He said he wants his audience to understand the dilemmas of the characters by being in their shoes.

About the making of the film, he said he chose it “to be as close to our lives as possible. I tried to bring a portrait of people living in metropolitan cities, where every individual is battling their own problems, so much that they often hesitate to recognise the plight of others.”

The senior Bader jurors, aged 18 to 25, discussed the documentary *Hafreiat* (Spain, Qatar, Jordan/2022) directed by Alex Sardà. The film is about Abo Day, a fugitive from Amman who lives in Gneyya, a small village in northern Jordan. He is one of the Jordanian workers hired for a Spanish archaeological expedition. The empathetic documentary chronicles a man’s relationship with his family.

Alex said the film was the result of a series of coincidences, meeting with the protagonist, and forming a bonding with him. “Our main idea when he followed the Spanish expedition team was to watch the connection they form with the communities, and to examine the interaction between the two teams. We went with an open mind, and came across Abo Day, who formed a rapport with us.”

The documentary, Alex said, evolved from the perspective of Abo Day, who was indeed guiding the narrative, as he opened up more and more, and shared his personal stories, which captivated the five-member crew. They shot the documentary in two months, but the film took four years to realize, emerging from over 150 hours of footage. He said the film and Abo Day’s story is a metaphor about everything that was happening at the expedition site.

The Special Edition of the 10th Ajyal Film Festival will screen a specially curated programme of important stories from around the world to over 613 jurors from 50 countries. They will also take part in the Ajyal Talks and Spotlight sessions in addition to taking part in lively discussions on cinema and critiquing the movies they watched.

Katara is the Cultural Partner of the Special 10th Edition of the Ajyal Film Festival. Contributing Partners include Darwish Holding, the Official Electronics Provider; with FNAC, Sony and 51 East; Qommunication is the Social Media Partner; and Friends of the Festival include Alkalive, the Official Water Sponsor; Giffoni, Qatar Museums, Leisure (Virtuocity).

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