



A FILM BY SANDRA GYSI & AHMED ABDEL MOHSEN

فيلم ل: أحمد عبد المحسن و ساندرا جيزي



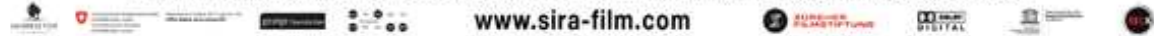
SIRA

SONGS OF THE CRESCENT MOON

سيرة آخر الأبطال

WITH SAYYED EL-DAWWY · RAMADAN EL-DAWWY · ABDEL RAHMAN EL-ABNOUDY · YOUSRY EL-GUINDY · MOHAMMED HOZAYN
 WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY SANDRA GYSI & AHMED ABDEL MOHSEN · CINEMATOGRAPHY PETER LIECHTI · AHMED ABDEL MOHSEN · SANDRA GYSI
 SOUND RAMÓN ORZA · EDITING ANJA BOMBELLI · MARCEL DEREK RAMSAY · PRODUCTION FRANZISKA RECK
 MUSIC SAYYED EL-DAWWY · RAMÓN ORZA · A PRODUCTION OF RECK FILMPRODUCTIONS ZÜRICH

SUPPORTED BY ZÜRCHER KUNSTSTIFTUNG · STÄDTEBAUREIHE FÜR KULTUR UND SOZIALC · ARABISCHER KUNSTFILM · GEWERBE FUNDATION · ROBINSONFONDS DER KULT. KÖRPERSCHEID · WEL. MEDIEN STIFTUNG · SAMI STIFTUNG · KULTURSEKTOR THEATER STIFTUNG · THEATER UND ORCHESTER HANNOVER STIFTUNG
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www.sira-film.com

RECK Filmproductions presents

Sira – Songs of the Crescent Moon

Script & Direction
Sandra Gysi & Ahmed Abdel Mohsen

with

Sayyed el-Dawwy, Ramadan el-Dawwy, Abdelrahman el-Abnoudy,
Yousry el-Guindy, Mohammed Hozayn

Switzerland 2011 / 77 min / color / 1: 1.85 / Dolby Digital

Production:

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www.sira-film.com

Release Switzerland

French part: 27 April 2011

German part: 25 August 2011

Festivals

7 – 13 April 2011	Visions du réel, Nyon, Switzerland ; International competition
21- 24 April 2011	Al Jazeera Film Festival, Doha, Qatar
28 April – 8 May 2011	Hot docs, Toronto, Canada
6 – 12 May 2011	Planete Doc Review, Warsaw, Poland
31 May – 5 June 2011	International Film Festival Innsbruck, Austria
17 – 23 October 2011	DOK Leipzig, Germany
25 – 30 October 2011	Jihlava International Documentary Film Festival, Czech Republic (update April 6 th 2011)

Summary

The film describes how traditions and modernity struggle in today's Egypt – and how a society is looking for its heroes, in the past and in the present.

80-year-old Sayyed el-Dawwy is the last living interpreter of the Sira, the most significant Arabian epic poem. He is the only one who knows by heart its 5 million verses. And only he keeps the stories about the people of the crescent moon alive. Now, he wants to pass the knowledge of the Sira down on to his grandson Ramadan, just as it has been passed down by word of mouth for generations.

SIRA – SONGS OF THE CRESCENT MOON follows them touring Egypt for their concerts. And while Sayyed wants to teach the Sira to his grandson the way he knows and loves it, Ramadan is more interested in modern interpretations of the Sira, influenced by Pop music and soap operas.

In the struggle of generations over the meaning of the Sira, the picture emerges of a world caught between tradition and modernity. A world in search for its respective heroes – in the past as well as in the present.

The Sira

UNESCO has declared the Sira an Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH). In doing so, it has not only acknowledged the cultural importance of the Sira but it has also confirmed that the epic and its traditions are of great significance far beyond the boundaries of Egypt and the Arabian world. After long preparations, the UNESCO has granted its patronage of this project with the explanation: «Finally, the ‚Hilali epic‘ is still considered to be the most important epic in the Arabian world - the only epic still performed in its integral musical form - even though it has disappeared from everywhere except Egypt. By presenting an important tradition of the Arabian cultural history, this documentary contributes to promoting intercultural understanding and international cultural cooperation».

The protagonists

Sayyed el-Dawwy

80 years old, lives in a village near Qus, Southern Egypt, is a Sira interpreter, the last of those who are capable of performing the entire Sira. That is around five million verses: these make up his whole vocabulary and his entire knowledge. Until the day of today, el-Dawwy has not learned to read or write. He has dedicated his whole life to the Sira and as Sira interpreter he has internalized the rhyme form so completely that he can improvise the stories. El-Dawwy earns his living with the fees he receives for his performances. He appears mainly in the area where he lives. Several times a year he is invited to Cairo or other Arabian countries to perform concerts.

Today he is passing along the family tradition of Sira narration to his grandson.

Ramadan el-Dawwy

Is 27 years old is the grandson of Sayyed el-Dawwy and prospective Sira interpreter. He lives with his wife and his son in the house of his grandfather. A few years ago, his grandfather began to teach him the Sira. He is still quite a way from being able to interpret the Sira poetically on his own. From time to time he does perform some of the stories for a close circle of friends. And although his Sira performances are greeted with enthusiasm, at times Ramadan thinks about whether or not he should just play songs at weddings, with which he can earn good money. Sometimes he feels that the responsibility of carrying on the family tradition is a heavy burden. He wonders if narrating the epic in this traditional manner is really appropriate for modern times.

Abdel Rahman el-Abnoudy is a well-known poet and has been researching the Sira for 40 years, organizes traditional Sira performances during the month of Ramadan and considers himself to be a cultural mediator.

Yousry el-Gunidi, scriptwriter and director became well known through his trivial soap opera about the Sira stories.

Mohammad Hozayn, politician and landowner in Esna, the south of Egypt, organizes Sira performances in his native city.

Crew

Written & directed by **Sandra Gysi & Ahmed Abdel Mohsen**

Cinematography **Peter Liechti, Ahmed Abdel Mohsen, Sandra Gysi**

Original Sound **Ramón Orza**

Editing **Anja Bombelli, Sandra Gysi, Ahmed Abdel Mohsen, Marcel Derek Ramsay**

Sounddesign & Mix **Ramón Orza** ganzerplatz

Tonstudio Letzi

Dolby Mastering, SDS Bern

Original Music **Sayyed el-Dawwy, Ramadan el-Dawwy, Mohammed Mounir**

Film Music **Ramón Orza**

Oud: Kamilya Jubran, Percussion: Roman Bruderer, p-train

Color Correcting **Peter Guyer** Rec TV, Bern; Assistant **Zoé Bucher**

Title Design **Haytham Nawar**

Graphic Design **Alexander Meier**

Webdesign **Thomas Lohbeck**

Production Management **Franziska Reck & Sandra Gysi**

Postproduction Manager **Sabine Girsberger**

Production **Franziska Reck**

A production of **RECK Filmproductions** Zurich

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Karl Mayer Stiftung

Gamil Stiftung

Alexis Victor Thalberg-Stiftung

Stiftung Bildung und Entwicklung Fachstelle «Filme für eine Welt»

Ernst und Olga Gubler-Hablützel Stiftung

Kirchenrat des Kantons Zürich

Katholische Kirchen im Kanton Zürich

Röm.-kath. Dekanat Region Bern

Reformierte Kirchen Bern-Jura-Solothurn

Reformierte Kirche Baselland

Succès passages antennes

Under the patronage of UNESCO Switzerland

Motivation

At the beginning we were simply enthusiastic about the traditional Sira music performances in which a Sira interpreter or singer performed the old epic in poetry form, accompanied by singers or musicians. The song is haunting and strikingly beautiful. The power of the poetry as presented captivates everyone, even those who do not understand the words.

The stories of the Sira, which have been passed down by word of mouth for generations, describe the adventures of the desert people of Bani Hilal, and his dark-skinned hero Abu Zayd. In the eleventh century they moved from the Arabian Peninsula to Egypt and North Africa. Their migration has its historical references in the spread of Islam in the mentioned areas. However, in the stories of the Sira a lot was added and dramatized. This «historical folk poetry» even includes contemporary topics. And until today the stories of the Sira are constantly changed in reference to present times.

As time passed, however, we began to be more interested in the qualities and function of the hero Abu Zaid. The many comparisons that are made between Abu Zaid and persons living in more modern times led us to the question: what is it that makes someone a hero today and who, exactly, are those heroes. This question became even more relevant after the unexpected revolution in Egypt.

The original tradition of reciting the Sira is going to disappear. The competition of modern forms of entertainment is too huge. But paradoxically the popular culture, which interprets the epic in a multitude of facets, seems to be a motor ensuring the continued existence of the Sira. And helps to present the Sira to a young audience. 80-year-old Sayyed el-Dawwy is the last living interpreter of the Sira. He is the only one who knows by heart its 5 million verses. Now, he wants to pass the Sira down on to his grandson Ramadan. But Ramadan struggles with his fate and the burden that he has to carry with this ancient tradition. In these two generations is reflected the preservation of the old and the awakening of something new.

We were very pleased that we gained the confidence of Sayyed el Dawwys and his grandson and that we could awake their enthusiasm for this documentary.

With SIRA - SONGS OF THE CRESCENT MOON we not only want to present the disappearing tradition of the Sira performance and set el-Dawwy a monument but also to confront the epic with modern times and open up a discussion about heroes. We find interest in how traditional values contrast demands of a modern society - an antagonism represented by Sayyed el-Dawwy and Ramadan.

Sandra Gysi & Ahmed Abdel Mohsen

Bio- Filmographies

Sandra Gysi

Born 1969 in Aarau, Switzerland. Studied Social Anthropology, Film Sciences and Germanistics at the University of Zurich, obtaining a Master's degree, with a thesis written about various popular artists in Cairo (1997). Regular sojourns in Egypt, study of the Arabian language. Various continued education courses in Directing, Camera, and Editing. As culture manager, organized various exhibition projects of contemporary art from Africa. Works part-time as film producer at vum Production in Zurich and produces films commissioned by the Schweizerischen Dienstleistungszentrums Berufsbildung | Berufs-, Studien- und Laufbahnberatung SDBB (Swiss Service Center Vocational Training / Professional, Study and Career Advisory Services), amongst others about professions in Switzerland. As freelance documentary filmmaker, realizes numerous films.

Filmography

- 2003 Salah Hassouna, An Egyptian Artist (documentary)
- 2003 Aufbruch unter dem Morgenstern, ein Fest bei den Dani auf West Papua (documentary)
- 2007 Madson Junior – Kinderstar in Afrika (documentary)
- 2007 La vie est courte, mais assez large, Isis 1919 (music film)
- 2011 Sira – Songs of the Crescent Moon (co-director, documentary)

Ahmed Abdel Mohsen

Born 1974 in Aswan, Egypt. Study of Media Sciences and Journalism at the Faculty of Art, South Valley University in Egypt, finishing with a thesis about the Function of Political Mass Media (1996). Works as hotel manager in Aswan (until 1999) and as Station Manager for Midwest Airlines (until 2001).

Graduate of the F+F film school in Zurich. Realizes various feature and documentary films, among others, about the holy festivals in Egypt. Works as freelance filmmaker, project manager and translator (Arabian to German and English) and as assistant at the F+F film school in Zurich.

Filmography

- 2003 Apple (short film)
- 2004 Rahim (short film)
- 2005 Away To God (documentary)
- 2006 Fragments Of Paradise (experimental film)
- 2008 In Between (experimental film)
- 2011 Sira – Songs of the Crescent Moon (co-director, documentary)

RECK FILMPRODUKTION GmbH

RECK Filmproduktion in Zurich was founded in 2000 by Franziska Reck and focuses mainly on the development and production of documentary and experimental film – especially film essays – for cinema and television.

Franziska Reck has been actively involved in the world of film for twenty years, energetically promoting independent filmmaking in Switzerland. Beginning as a film distributor at the Filmcoopi in Zurich (1983-1990), she continued building up the distribution and promotion of Swiss films as director of the IGV/CID (1993-2000) and as freelance film producer herself (since 1990).

RECK Filmproduktion stands for – and features – interest in the lifestyles and the diverse forms in which people express themselves, as well as the fascination with images – whether documentary, staged or experimental in nature. In the centre of the search are human encounters, images depicting what happens when different cultures come together.

Filmography

2011 SIRA – SONGS OF THE CRESCENT MOON by Sandra Gysi & Ahmed Abedl Mohsen

2011 AGAINST ALL ODDS by Anka Schmid, documentary

2010 BÖDÄLÄ – DANCE THE RHYTHM by Gitta Gsell, documentary

2009 ISA HESSE-RABINOVITCH – The Movie Game by Anka Schmid, documentary

2008 FEDERICA DE CESCO by Nino Jacusso, documentary

2008 MONSIEUR SELAVY by Peter Volkart, short film

2008 MUSIKLIEBE by Yusuf Yeşilöz, documentary

2007 RAJA'S REISE by Karl Saurer, documentary

2006 SWEEPING ADDIS by Corinne Kuenzli, documentary

2006 ZWISCHEN DEN WELTEN by Yusuf Yeşilöz, documentary

2005 IRENE SCHWEIZER by Gitta Gsell, documentary

2005 TERRA INCOGNITA by Peter Volkart, short film

2004 NAMIBIA CROSSINGS by Peter Liechti, film essay

2003 DIETER ROTH by Edith Jud, documentary

2002 ONOMA by Nino Jacusso and Gitta Gsell, 9 short films for Expo 02

2001 VIRUS-L by Gitta Gsell, experimental short film

2000 TRANSITO by Nino Jacusso, documentary

1996 A PROPOS DE JOYE by Isolde Marxer, documentary

1992 TRAUMZEIT by Franz Reichle, documentary

In preparation

SHANA by Nino Jacusso, fiction

A PASSAGE THROUGH INDIA by Christoph Schaub, documentary

ALTERN IN DER MIGRATION by Yusuf Yeşilöz, documentary

GLASPERLEN AUS GABLONZ by Corinne Kuenzli, documentary