

## Lifestyle | Features

Saudi Arabia's first female director **Haifaa Al-Mansour** to premiere **'The Perfect Candidate'** on OSN Store this Eid

Saudi Arabian director Haifaa Al-Mansour.

This month, OSN the region's leading entertainment network is bringing the ground-breaking movie, 'The Perfect Candidate' exclusively to OSN Store. Based on a female doctor who runs for office in Saudi Arabia, her campaign gathers unexpected momentum in this moving drama. Available to buy or rent from Sunday 23rd May, this film will leave viewers feeling both inspired and empowered.

Directed by Haifaa Al-Mansour, one of the most significant cinematic figures in the Kingdom — 'The Perfect Candidate' certainly lives up to its hype. The film tells the story of a Young doctor Maryam (Mila Al-Zahrani's debut) who surprises everyone by standing as a candidate for the local municipality in Saudi Arabia. Maryam's only desire is for the dirt road outside the local hospital to be surfaced, but no one takes this ambitious professional woman's modest political mission seriously.

Al-Mansour depicts Maryam's political mission as a mul-

ti-layered family drama. She lovingly outlines how the new candidate is supported by her sisters and how her father, a musician, worries about her progressive values. On tour with his band in conservative areas, he realizes Maryam's mission is about creative openness and freedom of expression.

After Al-Mansour directed the film WADJDA in 2012, making her the first director to ever shoot a film in its entirety in the Kingdom, she quickly found herself making movies in Hollywood. For her latest release, 'The Perfect Candidate', she returned to Saudi Arabia for a touching story about a woman trying to break the glass ceiling.

Haifaa Al-Mansour, Director of 'The Perfect Candidate' said: "The pace of modernization in Saudi Arabia is incredibly rapid right now. We are seeing so many changes, happening so fast, that it is hard for people to fully grasp the full extent of what is happening. I wanted to capture this moment through my film, of a society in transition, and the ways these

changes are perceived from people." With the film being nominated in the Venice Film Festival for Best Film, FEST International Film Festival for Best Film Main Program and the London Film Festival—'The Perfect Candidate' is a must-see.

The management of OSN said: "OSN is all about bringing exclusive entertainment to the region and we are proud to introduce 'The Perfect Candidate' to our exciting lineup this Eid. As a leading industry player, we are committed to celebrating local talent and making their content accessible to our customers across the Middle East. 'The Perfect Candidate' is a stunning, feel-good movie based on hope and determination which couldn't be timelier."

The film will be available to Buy & Keep or Rent for 48 hours on OSN Store from Sunday 23rd May and will launch later this year on linear channels.

## 'Real Lord of the Flies' shipwreck to become Hollywood movie

The remarkable story of six boys stranded on a remote island that has been dubbed the "Real Lord of the Flies" is to become a Hollywood movie, it was announced Friday. Dutch historian Rutger Bregman pieced together the true tale of how a group of Tongan teenagers ended up shipwrecked together in the Pacific for 15 months, after stealing a fisherman's boat in the 1960s. A newspaper article Bregman penned to promote his book "Humankind" went viral two weeks ago, sparking a fierce bidding war among Tinseltown studios.

"The Real Lord of the Flies will become a movie! The last two weeks have been a crazy rollercoaster," tweeted Bregman Friday. "Lots of Hollywood studios suddenly wanted to buy the rights to the story of Sione, Luke, Mano, Tevita, Fatai and Kolo," he added. Unlike in William Golding's classic novel "Lord of the Flies," the real-life boys peacefully co-operated during their time on the uninhabited rocky islet of 'Ata. "The kids worked together in teams of two, got a fire started and never let it go out, and stayed friends this whole time," Bregman wrote in an earlier tweet.

They survived on fish, coconuts, birds and eggs, drew up strict rosters for their duties, and even created a makeshift gym and badminton court. Rutger's article published by The Guardian describes how the author tracked down an Australian ship captain who miraculously spotted and rescued the boys. It has reportedly received 8 million views. After interest from "a lot of studios" who "bombarded" him with inquiries, Rutger spoke with the captain and four surviving castaways on a Zoom call. They decided to sell the rights to "The Revenant" and "12 Years a Slave" producer New Regency, and share the proceeds, Rutger wrote. Hollywood trade publication Deadline said "a low seven-figure deal" was being negotiated amid competing bids from the likes of Netflix and MGM. New Regency did not immediately respond to an AFP request for comment. —AFP



In this file photo taken on January 24, 2012 Uggie, a Jack Russell Terrier, visits The Empire State Building with his trainer Omar von Muller in New York City.



In this file photo Uggie, the canine star from the film "The Artist" walks the red carpet outside Grauman's Chinese Theatre to cast his paw prints in cement during a ceremony marking his retirement from show business in Hollywood.



In this file photo Uggie the dog from winner of Best Picture, "The Artist" poses with cast members in the press room at the 84th Annual Academy Awards in Hollywood, California.—AFP photos

## UGGIE THE STAR OF 'THE ARTIST' WINS GREATEST MOVIE MUTT AWARD

Uggie the adorable terrier from the Oscar-winning film "The Artist" was posthumously awarded the Palm Dog of Palm Dogs Friday for the best canine performance ever at the Cannes film festival. With the film world in mourning after Cannes was cancelled because of the coronavirus, the ceremony was conducted virtually, with Dash — Uggie's old friend and understudy, who also appeared in the 2011 silent comedy — accepting the diamante-encrusted collar on his behalf. Uggie passed away five years ago aged 13 but not before charming the world after making his first big splash at Cannes.

The Palm Dog is the doggie version of the festival's top prize, the Palme d'Or, and almost as sought after, with Quentin Tarantino, Noah Baumbach and Jim Jarmusch among a galaxy of top-dog directors who have emerged from the pack with the highly-prized collar between their teeth. Cannes would have reached its climax this weekend had the coronavirus not struck, completely overturning the movie calendar and now even calling the Oscars into question.

Cans of tinned rat  
Palm Dog founder Toby Rose told AFP that he

decided to honour Uggie not just for being the greatest Hollywood hound in the Palm Dog's two-decade history, but for proudly wearing the collar on his worldwide publicity tour for the film. "Every single year a journalist will pose the question, 'Is there going to be a year with (films with) no dogs?' We been doing this 19, coming on 20 years and dogs and directors never fail to come up with the goods," he added.

Indeed Tarantino admitted that he had his eye on the collar last year for "my wonderful actress Brandy", a pit bull who liked to chomp cans of tinned rat and who savaged the baddies in the gory final scene of "Once Upon A Time... In Hollywood". "I'm not going to give this to her — it'll go on my mantelpiece," he proudly told AFP after the dog who very nearly upstaged Brad Pitt won the award.

Uggie's trainer Omar Von Muller, who also worked on "Once Upon a Time in Hollywood", said winning the Palm Dog was the launchpad for "The Artist" and its fairytale Oscar success. "At the time we really didn't know how the movie would do and that's when the whole thing started going everywhere," he told AFP from his home north of Los Angeles, which is festooned with portraits of Uggie.

## 'He loved the attention'

"Uggie was a very, very special friend. He was a family member... He loved to work and the attention he got on set. He will be in our hearts forever," Von Muller said. "Things like the Palm Dog are very important for us because it recognises the work" dog trainers do, he said. Van Muller said they were no secrets to training dogs other than having heart and passion and making sure the dogs "enjoy what they're doing without ever being pressured... It starts very slowly, with a lot of patience and a lot love for the dogs."

Rose said the Palm Dog has since expanded its scope with its "Dogmanitarian" prize, honouring among others the British social realist master Ken Loach, who has made three-legged dogs a fixture in his films. "It represents the underdog," for which Loach has fought throughout his long career, Rose said. "Ken was so fabulously embracing of the idea and even told us about the castings," he told AFP. Can you imagine, Rose joked, "having to say to a three-legged dog, 'Sorry you ain't got the role.'" —AFP



In this file photo Actor Maurice Benard, actress Nancy Lee Grahn and actor Steve Burton speak onstage at the 'General Hospital' panel.—AFP photos



In this file photo Actor Anthony Geary (left) and actress Francis attend The Paley Center for Media Presents "General Hospital: Celebrating 50 years and Looking Forward" at The Paley Center for Media in Beverly Hills, California.

## Senegal TV uses soap to fight coronavirus

Senegal's latest TV drama star is a fictional doctor who provides coronavirus advice — a far cry from characters in the West African country's usual fare of infidelity-themed soap operas. Since late April, a short television show in the Wolof language dubbed "The Virus," has aired on social media and on a private channel, focusing on the day-to-day of life during the pandemic. "We wanted to make five- to eight-minute TV films to show what to do and what not to do to avoid the coronavirus," said the programme's director, Mohamed Moustapha Kante.

Wearing a facemask on his cluttered set in the capital city Dakar, Kante explained that the idea behind the series was to go beyond stilted government slogans such "wash your hands" or "cough into your elbow". The 30-episode series is being broadcast on ITV, one of the country's most popular channels. It started airing at the beginning of Ramadan and broadcasts in the evening, when the Muslim faithful break

their fast, and when many Senegalese like to sit in front of the box. In "The Virus," the fictional Doctor Diouf appears at the end of episodes constructed around daily life in average Senegalese homes, to proffer his advice. "The messages vary from day to day," said Alioune Thiam, the actor who plays Dr. Diouf.

In one episode, for example, a young man criticises his sister who is too engrossed by social media to listen to health warnings about COVID-19. She learns her lesson when she eventually catches the virus, however. "We're getting feedback from viewers," says Thiam. "For example, someone told us he didn't know that diarrhoea was one of the symptoms". Senegalese authorities have recorded some 1,200 coronavirus cases to date, with 33 fatalities, a low number compared to Europe and the United States. —AFP



Director Mohamed Moustapha Kanté (left) directs Khalifa Diouf (center), who plays the role of Lif in the television show "The Virus", during filming in Dakar.—AFP

## VIRUS TRIPS UP US SOAP OPERA 'GENERAL HOSPITAL', 57 YEARS ON

Will Michael get full custody of his son Wiley? Will Sasha's romantic woes lead her down the road to addiction? Will Sonny and Julian battle it out once again? Fans of "General Hospital" are awaiting answers to these questions — but they could end up waiting a long time, as the last new episode of the beloved US soap opera airs Thursday. For the first time since its debut in 1963, and after more than 14,500 episodes, the ABC program will be on forced hiatus due to disruptions in production sparked by the coronavirus crisis.

"I've been watching this show since like I was maybe eight or nine years old," says Tiana Jones, a 29-year-old who lives in New York's Queens neighbourhood. "So not having that key part of my everyday life is hard." Filming on "General Hospital" came to a screeching halt in March, as it did for the vast majority of TV shows and films in progress, when businesses moved into lockdown mode. Social distancing on a soap set? Impossible. The team behind the show re-edited episodes, adding lengthy flashbacks to make their new material last longer, and aired reruns of classic episodes on

Fridays — but the well has run dry. "GH" is not alone. "The Bold and the Beautiful" and "The Young and the Restless" — which air on CBS — ran out of shows last month. That leaves NBC's "Days of Our Lives" — which shoots episodes months in advance — as the last soap standing through the summer and into the fall.

## 'Me time'

Soap operas began as radio shows before migrating to television. Storylines — which once focused largely on romantic hijinks and family drama — have expanded to include everything from the AIDS crisis to transgender acceptance to #MeToo harassment. "It's a daily habit... an hour of me time," says 65-year-old Donna Walsh Costello, who had been watching the show more or less since the beginning. "General Hospital" regularly draws slightly more than two million viewers a day. But with more people stuck at home, its ratings soared — nearly to the top of the daytime charts.

ABC did not respond to requests for comment about when production could resume on "General Hospital," which

boasts famous alumni like Demi Moore and Ricky Martin. California Governor Gavin Newsom said Wednesday he would soon unveil plans for the entertainment industry, but noted there were likely to be delays in Los Angeles.

## Tradition

For Mary Sue Price, who worked as a writer on "General Hospital" from the late 1990s to 2012, the show's enduring popularity stems from its "tradition of telling really strong stories" and the longevity of its characters. Show stalwarts include Kin Shriner and Genie Francis, who arrived in Port Charles — the fictitious New York city where the show takes place — in 1977 as Scott and Laura. "There's a sort of continuity to it that people find really comforting and really reassuring," Price said. Michael Maloney, who writes for the Soap Hub website, says soaps "offer consistency in a world that doesn't always have consistency." —AFP