



Press Release

The Friday Hangout: MENA Arts UK Takeover

*****Embargoed until Friday 22 January 11am GMT*****

The Arab British Centre is joining forces with MENA ARTS UK to bring back their Friday Hangout talk series

The Arab British Centre is pleased to announce the return of their Friday Hangout talk series, in partnership with arts organisation MENA Arts UK. This “Hangout Takeover” will focus on platforming MENA+ (Middle East, North Africa and surrounding area) professionals working in the live and recorded arts, inviting guests **director Sally El Hosaini, playwright Abi Zakarian, actor Amir El-Masry, and musician Khyam Allami** to discuss their work and answer live questions from the public via Zoom.

The Friday Hangout: MENA Arts UK Takeover will start on the 5 February and will offer audiences interested in MENA+ culture the chance to come together and meet with prestigious arts professionals in an intimate and informal setting.

The first series of the Friday Hangouts ran from March – August in 2020. Rapidly devised by the Arab British Centre days after the UK went into lockdown in March 2020, the Hangouts were created to encourage a sense of cultural community during the Covid-19 outbreak, and offer a platform for guests to reflect on the lockdown and talk about their work in a time when for many it had been severely uprooted. Over 12 weeks, hundreds of people attended Hangouts with guests including chef Sami Tamimi, artists Manal AlDowayan, Amado Alfadni and Ghadah Alkandari, actor Youssef Kerkour, organisations Liverpool Arab Arts Festival and MARSM, writer Selma Dabbagh, and many more.

MENA Arts UK was formed in 2020 to celebrate artists working in the UK live and recorded arts with a connection to the Middle East, North Africa and the surrounding area. Their objectives include lobbying for appropriate representation, advocating for change, and seeking to increase UK work opportunities. The organisation has launched the UK’s first ever online directory of all MENA+ professional artists, including creatives, technicians and academics.

The Takeover programme will welcome to the Hangouts :

5 February: Sally El Hosaini, a feature film writer / director whose acclaimed debut feature, *My Brother The Devil*, picked up major prizes at Sundance, Berlin and London Film Festivals.

19 February: Abi Zakarian, an award-winning British-Armenian writer whose plays include *Perfect Myth Allegory*, produced by Jermyn Street Theatre; *I am Karyan Ophidian*, produced by Shakespeare's Globe Theatre; and *Fabric*, produced by Tremers for Edinburgh Fringe Festival 2016, winning a Fringe First Award.

5 March: Amir El-Masry, an award winning British Egyptian actor who has most recently been named a BAFTA Breakthrough Brit and earned a Best Actor nomination for his lead performance in the critically acclaimed feature film, *Limbo*

19 March: Khyam Allami, an Iraqi-British multi-instrumentalist musician, composer, researcher and founder of Nawa Recordings.

Amani Hassan, Acting Executive Director of the Arab British Centre said: "We are delighted to be bringing back our Friday Hangout series with our friends at MENA Arts UK. As the Covid-19 pandemic continues to severely impact life here in the UK, creating spaces where we can come together for a moment of community, culture, and creativity is as essential now as it was back in March last year. As a body of professionals working in the live and recorded arts – a sector which has been hugely affected by the pandemic – we couldn't dream up a more timely or exciting partner than MENA Arts UK."

Laura Hanna, a member of the MENA Arts UK steering group, is co-producer of the Takeover series. She is a British-Egyptian multidisciplinary performer and creative who recently performed in *A History of Water in the Middle East* at The Royal Court: "We've been overwhelmed by the incredible response to our launch last year and are so excited to be partnering with The Arab British Centre - this Takeover means we can create and open up conversations around the work of MENA+ artists for a wider audience."

End

Notes for Editor

Dates and Times

The Hangouts will run on 5 and 19 February, and 5 and 19 March. All Hangouts will run on Zoom from 1-2pm GMT. Registration is free but essential.

More information and registrations here:

<https://www.arabbritishcentre.org.uk/whatson/friday-hangout-mena-arts-uk-takeover>

Arab British Centre

The Arab British Centre is a cultural organisation which works to further understanding of the Arab world in the United Kingdom. We organise and promote cultural and artistic events, and host a community of like-minded resident organisations at our central London premises.

www.arabbritishcentre.org.uk

MENA Arts UK

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MENA Arts UK is led by a steering group of 11 UK professionals (6F, 5M) who are diverse in age, experience and work in many different art forms as directors, writers, actors, producers, designers and choreographers. Some are new graduates and others established cultural leaders. Between them, they speak over 10 languages and have worked all over the UK and globally.

<https://www.menaarts.uk/>

Sally El Hosaini

Sally El Hosaini is a feature film writer / director. Her acclaimed debut feature, MY BROTHER THE DEVIL, picked up major prizes at Sundance, Berlin and London Film Festivals. She was selected for BAFTA's 2017 Elevate programme and was subsequently invited to sit on BAFTA's Film Committee. Sally was one of eight directors chosen for NBC Universal's Directors Fellowship 2017. Sally is currently in pre-production on her second feature film, THE SWIMMERS. Based on the true life story of Syrian refugee and Olympic swimmer Yusra Mardini, the screenplay was co-written with Jack Thorne and is being produced by Working Title Films and Netflix with Stephen Daldry as an EP.

Abi Zakarian

Abi Zakarian is an award-winning British-Armenian writer. Her plays include: PERFECT MYTH ALLEGORY produced by Jermyn Street Theatre; I AM KARYAN OPHIDIAN produced by Shakespeare's Globe Theatre; FABRIC, produced by Damsel Productions for Soho Theatre; I HAVE A MOUTH AND I WILL SCREAM produced by Joyous Gard for VAULT Festival where it won the festival's 2018 People's Choice Award; THIS IS NOT AN EXIT, produced by the RSC for The Other Place transferring to the Royal Court; and FABRIC, produced by Tremers for Edinburgh Fringe Festival 2016, winning a Fringe First Award. She is developing FABRIC for television and under commission with Shakespeare's Globe Theatre and 45North.

Amir El-Masry

Amir El-Masry is an award winning British Egyptian actor. Born in Cairo, raised in London, he made his screen debut in Ramadan Mabrouk Abu El Alamein Hamouda where he won Best Young Actor at the Egyptian Oscars. He has most recently been named a BAFTA Breakthrough Brit and earned a Best Actor nomination for his lead performance in the critically acclaimed feature film, Limbo.

Since graduating from LAMDA, he has appeared in multi award-winning series THE NIGHT MANAGER, the BAFTA-nominated THE STATE, opposite Woody Harrelson in LOST IN LONDON and played the lead in THE ARABIAN WARRIOR. Recent work includes a leading role in Netflix series THE ONE and HBO series INDUSTRY, produced and directed by Lena Dunham. Amir is due to start filming Miriam Heard's IM AT HOME HERE starring alongside Naomi Ackie and produced by Sarah Brocklehurst (Animals).

Khyam Allami

Khyam Allami (born in Damascus 1981) is an Iraqi-British multi-instrumentalist musician, composer, researcher and founder of Nawa Recordings. Primarily a performer of the Oud, his artistic research focuses on the development of contemporary and experimental repertoire based on the fundamentals of Arabic music, with a focus on tuning and microtonality. He holds a BA and Masters in Ethnomusicology from SOAS, University of London and is currently completing an M4C/AHRC funded PhD in composition at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, Birmingham City University.