



Rising Stars

itinerant cinema in Egypt



THE HISTORY OF EGYPTIAN CINEMA

The first commercial movie in the world was a silent movie for The *Lumière* brothers. It was screened in December 1895 in the Indian saloon, Grand Café, Caposeen st. Paris. The films of the *Lumière* Brothers were screened in Egypt soon after their debut in Europe in 1896 at the prestigious cafés of Cairo, Alexandria and Port Said.

This is how the Egyptian short documentary industry has started

Feature films, on the other hand, haven't existed till the year 1917 when an Italian Egyptian Production company produced two feature films: *The Honor of the Bedouin* (Charaf el badawî) and *The Deadly Flowers* (el Azhâr el momítah). However, Historians cannot agree on setting a certain date for the beginning of the Egyptian cinema.

Some say that the real start was the screening of the first Egyptian movie back in 1896. Others mark the beginning of the Egyptian Cinema with the shooting of the first short documentary silent movie in the 20th of June 1907 about the visit of Khedive Abbas Hilmi II to the Institute of Mursi Abul-Abbas in Alexandria.

In 1927, two of the most famous movies in the early history of the Egyptian cinema were produced and screened. The first film was called *A Kiss in the Desert* and the other was called *Layla*, starred by the first actress in the history of Egyptian Cinematography, Aziza Emir.

Egypt's first film with sound was *The nobles' sons* starring legendary actors Youssef Wahba and Amina Rezk and produced in 1932. The same year witnessed the first musical film starring for the first time a female singer, Nadera. Shortly after *The white flower* was released starring, also for the first time, the Egyptian singer: Mohammed Abdel Wahab.

The establishment of **Studio Misr** in 1935 was considered the biggest jump in the history of Cinema in Egypt. Unlike other studios, Studio Misr remained the cornerstone of the cinematic production in Egypt. Also, the casinos and theaters of Emad El Din Street - known as the Street of art at that time-witnessed a great progress till the beginning of the II World War. *Dawood*, starring the very famous singer Om Kolthom and produced by Studio Misr, was the first Egyptian movie screened outside Egypt.

After the Second World War, **the number of films produced in Egypt doubled from 16 movies in 1944 to 67 in 1946**. That period witnessed the rise of **famous Filmmakers** like: Ahmed Badrakhan, Henry Barakat, Hassan El Emam, Ibrahim Emara, Ahmed Kamel Morsi, Helmi Rafla, Kamal El Sheikh, Hassan El Seefy, Salah Abo Seef, Kamel El Telmesani, Ezz El Din Zo El Fakar and Anwar wagdy (who



presented a series of musicals). The same golden period has also introduced the rise of **the popular cinema stars** like: Layla Morad, Shadia, Fatem Hamama, Magda El Sabahy, Mariam Fakhr El Din, Taheya Karioka, Nadia Lotfi, Hind Rostom, Omar El Shereef, Yehya Shaheen, Estifan Rosti, Farid Shawki, Ahmed Ramzy, Salah zo El Fakar, and Anwar Wagdy. **Baba Atris** was the first Egyptian colored movie. The film was produced in 1950, starring Naima Akef and Kamal El Shenawi.

Cinema Production was nationalized in the 60s which led to: the reduction of production level from 60 to 40 films a year, as well as the Cinema Theatres were reduced from 354 in 1945 to 255 in 1966.

The Egyptian movies in the 60s can be divided into three sections:

1. Movies that tackle the issues of poverty, underline the value of work and praise the communist society such as *The thief and the dogs*.
2. Movies that condemn the opportunists' figures and the social diseases like bribery, corruption, and robbery crimes such as *Miramar* movie.
3. Movies that empathise the case of people participation in politics, criticizing the negativity and discussing the issues of democracy and resistance such as *The rain dried*.

In the mid of 1971, a public entity was established including Cinema, Theater, and Music. The role of the State was subsidized and ended up producing feature movies. Only two companies remained under the control of the state: one for the Studios and other for Distribution and Cinemas. But the mid rate of production remained 40 films a year till 1974 and then got higher to reach 50. As for the number of cinemas, it went down to 190 in 1977.

With the beginning of the 80s, a group of new and young directors succeeded in breaking the production main stream tradition, building a serious kind of cinema which was called the stream of **new realism** or the 80th generation cinema. Among these Directors: Atef El Tayeb, Raafat El Mihy, khairy Beshara, Mohamed Khan and others.

Suddenly the rate of the screened movies rose to 63 in the mid 80s and especially in 1985, which was known as the wave of contracting films. These kinds of films were mainly low production films with bad artistic standards aiming to fill the videotapes and sell it to the Gulf Countries. In the year 1986 the contracting films line reached its peak by producing 95 movies.

By the end of 80s and beginning of 90s and specifically after the Gulf War, it was obvious that the **contracting films production went down** as an outcome of the market low demand of Gulf countries and so another group of directors tried to change, among them *Radwan El Kashef*, *Osama Fawzi* and *Said Hamed*.

Since then, more than 4.000 films have been produced in Egypt, three quarters of the total Arab production. Egypt is the most productive country in the Middle East in the field of film production, and the one with the most developed media system.