

MAY IN THE SUMMER – Press Kit

CAST

May
Dalia
Yasmine
Anu Brennan
Nadine
Ziad
Edward Brennan

CHERIEN DABIS
ALIA SHAWKAT
NADINE MALOUF
RITU SINGH PANDE
HIAM ABBASS
ALEXANDER SIDDIG
BILL PULLMAN

CREW

Written & Directed by
Produced by

Executive Producer
Executive Producers

Co-Producers

Director of Photography
Production Designer
Edited by
Music by
Costume Designer
Casting by

CHERIEN DABIS
CHERIEN DABIS
ALIX MADIGAN-YORKIN
CHRISTOPHER TRICARICO
RITU SINGH PANDE
RICK ROSENTHAL
NICHOLAS MORTON
SABINE SIDAWI HAMDAN
ALEXANDRE MALLET-GUY
JOY GOODWIN
BEAU J. GENOT
BRIAN RIGNEY HUBBARD
OLA MASLIK
SABINE HOFFMAN, A.C.E.
CARLO SILIOTTO
BEATRICE HARB
CINDY TOLAN, CSA

(Extended credits available upon request)

MAY IN THE SUMMER

Short Synopsis

MAY IN THE SUMMER follows sophisticated New Yorker May Brennan to her childhood home of Amman, Jordan for her wedding. Shortly after reuniting with her sisters and their long-since divorced parents, myriad familial and cultural conflicts lead May to question the big step she is about to take.

Synopsis

To all appearances, MAY BRENNAN has it all -- intelligent, gorgeous, the recipient of raves for her recently published book and set to marry her loving fiancé ZIAD, a distinguished New York scholar. But immediately upon returning to her familial hometown of Amman, Jordan for the wedding, the cracks in her seemingly perfect life begin to show. Her headstrong, born-again Christian mother NADINE disapproves of Ziad, a Muslim, firm in her decision to not attend the ceremony. Her sisters DALIA and YASMINE revert to behaving like rebellious teenagers. And her estranged father EDWARD, newly remarried, awkwardly attempts to make amends. Confronted with the wounds of her parent's long-broken relationship, coupled with the unavoidable clash of old-world and modern values, May is lead to question the direction her life is taking. Soon, her once carefully structured world appears to unravel as she grapples with her own truths.

MAY IN THE SUMMER was written and directed by Cherien Dabis (AMREEKA), and stars Dabis, Alia Shawkat, Nadine Malouf, Ritu Singh Pande, Hiam Abbass and Bill Pullman. The film was produced by Dabis, Alix Madigan-Yorkin and Christopher Tricarico.

Q&A with Cherien Dabis

What was your initial inspiration for the script?

I grew up spending summers in Jordan with my mom and sisters. We'd stay with my grandparents' where we slept on mattresses along the floor. It was cramped, there was no privacy and our personalities couldn't have clashed more. The oppressive heat kept us confined under the same roof, which was just as well because we didn't have anywhere to go anyway. It was a recipe for family drama.

When I was 17, my parents separated, and that family rupture has always been a wound I've wanted to confront. My mom moved back to Jordan in order to be closer to family, and I found myself spending even more time there. Whereas in the small Ohio town where we lived for most of my younger years, I was considered Arab, in Jordan, I was seen as the American. It was an interesting paradox and a part of my identity that I wanted to explore.

The subject of interfaith and intercultural marriage is a source of narrative conflict in the film. Can you discuss your direct or indirect experience with this and why you wanted to explore it?

I've certainly dated a fair share of people my mother has disapproved of. Attempting to reconcile her disapproval and subsequent prejudices with my own values and personal choices was undoubtedly a struggle large enough to inspire a screenplay. And yet it's much greater than that. What could appear to simply be my own mom's draconian belief system is really a symptom of a huge cultural problem: interfaith and intercultural marriage are not only frowned

upon in Middle Eastern societies, they're forbidden. I've seen it many times over up close and personal in my own family throughout the years. An uncle or cousin inadvertently creates a family scandal of epic proportions when they fall in love with someone of another religious or ethnic background. It's an issue that speaks directly to the heart of a major conflict plaguing the Middle East, and therefore, an issue I wanted to explore.

How did you come to choose your primary cast?

I had worked with Hiam Abbass and Alia Shawkat on my first film, and it was such a great experience that I knew I wanted to work with them again. So when I started writing MAY, I immediately knew they'd be right for their roles.

I worked closely with NY-based casting director Cindy Tolan to find the other main cast members. We found actress Nadine Malouf (YASMINE) at an audition in the city. She was incredibly natural and her energy was vibrant, carefree and fun loving. She also had wonderful comic timing from the start.

I've been a fan of Bill Pullman since *Sleepless in Seattle*. And while I thought he was the ideal actor for the part, I never realistically thought he would accept. On top of the fact that we were a small indie outfit, I knew I'd have to find someone adventurous enough to travel halfway around the world to shoot entirely in Jordan. I was beyond thrilled when I heard he wanted to do it.

We searched for over a year for an Arab American actor to play May and in the end, had a couple of candidates that we were seriously considering. At the same time, a friend of mine convinced me to audition for her film. We shot a scene from her film, and when she offered me the part, I started thinking about my own film. I was gun shy, but another friend encouraged me to put myself on tape. It was interesting, but I wasn't convinced. So my friend sent my audition tape along with the auditions of the other actresses for the part to a neutral third party; someone I didn't know; who knew nothing about the film. This person watched the auditions and wrote an incredibly candid paragraph on why I was the best choice for the part. I didn't expect this at all but his argument was compelling enough that I called myself back (for another audition) and worked on it until I started to think it was - in fact - the best choice for the film. Eventually I shared my audition with the casting director and producers. Much to my surprise, they didn't protest and seemed to think it was a natural choice. It made no sense! And the man who for all intents and purposes cast me, Hal Lehrman, became my acting coach. If it hadn't been for him, I don't think I would've ever had the courage to try it.

What were some of the most interesting challenges this created for you?

Putting myself in the position of actor / director for the first time left me in a much more vulnerable position than I would've ever thought. I often found myself struggling to manage my own natural insecurities. Thankfully, I was somewhat prepared for it. I had trained with Hal for a year and a half – specifically working on developing the skill necessary to go from directing to acting and back – constantly. As you can imagine, each requires a completely different mind-set, a very different approach. Directing requires complete control and awareness of what everyone is saying and doing. You're looking at the big picture and seeing everyone's point-of-view and yet translating it into the playable action for each actor. Acting, on the other hand, demands letting go entirely, allowing yourself to lose control and attempting to forget what's about to happen. The way you do it is to immerse yourself in the details of your character's experience of the story events. This continual shift in perspective created a very interesting challenge.

You shot the film in Jordan. Can you discuss the process that led to choosing Jordan and what it was like shooting there?

My mother is Jordanian, so I've spent the last 30 years travelling to Jordan. I've seen the country grow and change so remarkably that it's shocking. One of the most surprising ways it's changed is that it's become incredibly Americanized. Twenty years ago, there wasn't a remnant of anything American anywhere. Finding popular American brands at the supermarket was nearly impossible. Now American fast food chains, shopping malls and car dealerships nestle on every corner of Amman's streets. The city epitomizes the convergence of my two identities in a strangely familiar and often hilariously contradictory way.

Given what little most people know and see of the Middle East, I chose to shoot in Jordan in order to show this highly unexpected Americanized side of the Arab world. I wanted to illuminate the endearing contradictions inherent within a culture so known for its disdain of American foreign policy and yet so admiring of American culture from KFC to JLo to *Pirates of the Caribbean*. And even still, Amman is a strong Islamic, Arab capital. Nowhere else in the Arab world can one find such a unique melding of ancient and modern, American and Arab.

Of course we encountered all kinds of logistical challenges during production. Jordan is quite a bureaucratic place, and its pace didn't always agree with the speed at which our production needed to move. There was always a lag on approvals and permits and the process of getting them was often confusing and encumbered. On top of that, Jordan's film industry is still relatively new and many resources need to be brought into the country from neighboring Lebanon. As the borders with Syria were closed due to the political unrest there, we had to limit our equipment because it had to be flown in as opposed to driven from Lebanon through Syria and into Jordan, the way it would normally and much less expensively be done. We had to bring in all of our key crew and our main and secondary cast flew in from New York, Los Angeles, Paris, London and Beirut.

And then there was the food poisoning and heat stroke. We were shooting at the height of summer in Jordan, and at the lowest place on earth, the Dead Sea, it was a whopping 114 degrees!

In terms of setting, was your choice of the Dead Sea as the site of the bachelorette party symbolic or significant to your mind?

Absolutely. I've been going there since I was a kid and wanted to capture the duality of what it is and what it's become – a serenely quiet and peaceful place known for its soothing, healing waters yet surrounded by conflict and hostility with occupied Palestine a stones-throw away. (No pun intended.) And – perhaps the best part – home to enormous luxury resorts and spas known for their Spring Break-like party atmospheres. There's a whole lot simmering beneath the surface and nothing is quite as it seems. For a movie aimed at portraying the contradictory nature of its setting, it would've been criminal not to set the bachelorette party there. Not to mention, as the lowest point on the face of the earth, it seemed the perfect location in which to bring the story conflict to a head.

There seems to be a growing cinema landscape in the region. Did you feel this and how did it impact you?

I've been lucky enough to be a part of the growing cinema landscape in the region for some time now. Ever since I shot my first short film in the West Bank back in 2005. It's been amazing to see it change and grow. While I shot part of *Amreeka* in the West Bank, *May in the Summer* is my first feature shot entirely in the Middle East.

On the one hand, it can be frustrating to be a part of something that's still in process. It means serious struggle due to the fact that there isn't always the support necessary to make things happen the way you envision. It means taking on much more than one individual is physically capable of in order to produce what is intended. I think all my key crew who were brought in from the U.S. and Lebanon felt that.

On the other hand, it's immensely gratifying to feel part of something new, to contribute to and be inspired by the growth of a burgeoning industry. Most films that shoot in Jordan shoot Jordan for another place – Palestine, Afghanistan, Iraq. The stories for these films are mostly war-driven and set in villages and deserts close to the borders. *May in the Summer* was an American production not only shooting Jordan for Jordan, but also featuring the country as a character in the film and revealing it's cosmopolitan side as well it's natural and spiritual landscapes. In some ways, the film is a love letter to the country in which I partly grew up.

BIOGRAPHIES

Cherien Dabis – Writer, Director, Producer (May)

Cherien Dabis is an award-winning feature filmmaker who received her MFA in film from Columbia University. She wrote, directed, produced and edited several short films including MAKE A WISH, which premiered at the 2007 Sundance Film Festival, Berlin International Film Festival as well as Clermont-Ferrand, where it won the Press Prize and Jury's Special Mention, among other awards. Dabis worked for three seasons as a writer and co-producer on Showtime's groundbreaking, original hit series THE L WORD, before going on to make her feature writing and directorial debut with AMREEKA.

In 2009, AMREEKA world premiered at the Sundance Film Festival, opened New Director's/New Films at MoMA, and won the prestigious FIPRESCI award in the Director's Fortnight at Cannes. It was nominated for a Best Picture Gotham Award, 3 Independent Spirit Awards, and was named one of the Top Ten Independent Films of the Year by the National Board of Review. The same year, Dabis was also named one of Variety's "Ten Directors to Watch."

Dabis returns to Sundance with her second feature MAY IN THE SUMMER. In it, she makes her acting debut alongside Hiam Abbass, Alia Shawkat, Alexander Siddig and Bill Pullman.

A Guggenheim Fellow, USA Rockefeller Fellow and winner of the Humanitas Prize as well as the Adrienne Shelly Excellence in Filmmaking Award, Dabis is an alumnus of the Sundance Screenwriter's Lab, Film Independent Director's Lab and Tribeca All Access, where she was honored with the L'Oréal Paris Woman of Worth Vision Award. She was also appointed a New York Foundation for the Arts Artist Fellow in Playwriting / Screenwriting and has received a Renew Media / Tribeca Film Institute Media Artist Fellowship. She has also been awarded grants from Time Warner, Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art, National Geographic, the Jerome Foundation, the New York State Council on the Arts and the Sundance / NHK International Filmmaker Award.

Dabis has been an advisor for the Sundance Screenwriter's Labs in both Turkey and Jordan and has taught in the graduate film program at Columbia University. She currently resides in New York City.

Alia Shawkat (Dalia)

California native Alia Shawkat continues to establish herself as an acclaimed film and television actor. Named one of Variety's "10 Actors to Watch for 2009" and one of Hollywood Reporter's 10 rising comedy talents, she is currently in production on the highly anticipated return of the Emmy award-winning ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT series for Netflix, with the season premiere in Spring 2013. In the last year, she has been busy filming multiple projects: NIGHT MOVES with Jesse Eisenberg and Dakota Fanning; THE TO-DO LIST; BRASS TEAPOT; and THE MOMENT with Jennifer Jason Leigh.

Debuting in THREE KINGS with George Clooney, Shawkat recently starred in the independent drama THE ORANGES with Hugh Laurie and Leighton Meester and independent comedy THAT'S WHAT SHE SAID opposite Anne Heche. Other feature film credits include Jonathon Dayton's and Valerie Faris' RUBY SPARKS, Miguel Arteta's CEDAR RAPIDS, Drew Barrymore's WHIP IT, and Cherian Dabis' AMREEKA. Shawkat also co-starred and served as a producer on BART GOT A ROOM with William H. Macy and Cheryl Hines.

On the small screen, Shawkat began at age 11 when she landed a leading role on the ABC Family series STATE OF GRACE. However, she is best known as the rebellious and mischievous Maeby Funke on Fox's ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT. With a recurring role on USA Network's STARTER WIFE with Debra Messing, additional credits include a starring role in the Lifetime original movie NOT LIKE EVERYONE ELSE and guest starring roles on VERONICA MARS, JAG, WITHOUT A TRACE, BOOMTOWN, and PRESIDIO MED.

Nadine Malouf (Yasmine)

Australian native and graduate of Syracuse's acclaimed drama department, Nadine Malouf makes her feature film debut in MAY IN THE SUMMER. Other acting credits span a film short, theater, including New York theater: STATIC SHOCK BLACKOUT; the 25th anniversary national tour of LES MISERABLES; NARROW DAYLIGHT, LES ENFANTS DE PARIS, OCEAN IN A TEACUP, ONLY A KINGDOM, and THE HIDDEN SKY, respectively.

Ritu Singh Pande (Anu Brennan)

New-York-based actress Ritu Singh Pande was born and raised in India where she placed as a finalist in the Miss India pageant, Singh Pande began acting professionally in Mumbai, landing television and commercial roles. Moving to the US, Singh Pande graduated from the New York Conservatory of Dramatic Arts, and has continued to train and work with HB Studio and Terry Schreiber Studios. She debuted on the New York stage with HAPPY HOUR at the Michael Chekhov Theater Company and in feature films with *Festival of Lights*, playing opposite Aidan Quinn. Inspired by the many challenges confronting a minority woman actor, Singh Pande founded the New-York-based Durga Entertainment in 2009, an independent film production company developing feature films that champion strong and compelling minority female characters in narratives relevant to our current social environment.

Hiam Abbass (Nadine)

Hiam Abbass was born in Nazareth, lived in Israel, and launched her acting career in Paris in the 80s. Her feature film credits include Rashid Masharawi's HAIFA; Raja Amari's SATIN ROUGE; Hany Abu-Assad's Academy Award-nominated PARADISE NOW; Amos Gitai's FREE ZONE; and Steven Spielberg's MUNICH. Additionally, on MUNICH, as well as Alejandro González Iñárritu's BABEL, she worked as creative consultant and acting coach to the first-time actors and children. Abbass has performed in 2 films by the Israeli director Eran Riklis, THE SYRIAN BRIDE and LEMON TREE. The latter won the Berlin International Film Festival's Audience Award as well as international acclaim for Abbass, including a European Film Award nomination and an Israeli Film Best Actress Academy Award. Also among her credits are AMREEKA, in which she first worked with Dabis, Dima El-Horr's EVERY DAY IS A HOLIDAY, Jim Jarmush's THE LIMITS OF CONTROL and Radu Mihaileanu's THE SOURCE.

She starred as the real-life heroine Hind Hussein in Julian Schnabel's MIRAL which world-premiered at the 2010 Venice Film Festival. She received critical acclaim for her performance opposite Academy Award-nominee Richard Jenkins in Thomas McCarthy's THE VISITOR.

Having just completed shooting in Laïla Marrakchi's ROCK THE CASBAH, Abbass has written and directed two short films, LE PAIN, in which she also starred, and LA DANSE ÉTERNELLE. Her directorial debut in her first feature, INHERITANCE, opened at the 2012 Venice Film Festival and in France this past December.

Bill Pullman (Edward Brennan)

Bill Pullman's films include the major motion pictures INDEPENDENCE DAY, WHILE YOU WERE SLEEPING and LOST HIGHWAY as well as the most recent independent films RIO SEX COMEDY, BOTTLE SHOCK, PHOEBE IN WONDERLAND, and SURVEILLANCE, among many others. His theater work includes THE JACKSONIAN from Pulitzer Prize-winning author Beth Henley (*Crimes of the Heart*), the Broadway revival of David Mamet's OLEANNA opposite Julia Stiles, the Broadway world premiere of Edward Albee's THE GOAT (Drama Desk nomination), and Albee's most recent production PETER & JERRY (Drama Desk nomination).

Pullman directed for the anthology TV series NIGHT VISIONS, and directed and produced the TNT movie THE VIRGINIAN (Wrangler Award/Best Picture, 2000). He also starred in the television mini-series TORCHWOOD, as well as HBO's TOO BIG TO FAIL (2011) for director Curtis Hanson.

Pullman is the subject of the new documentary from award-winning director Yung Chang (*Up The Yangtze, China Heavyweight*) entitled THE FRUIT HUNTERS. He is at the 2013 Sundance Film Festival with the new film from award-winning director Cherien Dabis (*Amreeka*), entitled MAY IN THE SUMMER.

Currently, Bill Pullman also stars as President Dale Gilchrist in NBC's quirky family comedy "1600 Penn."

Alix Madigan-Yorkin - Producer

Alix Madigan-Yorkin produced WINTER'S BONE, directed by Debra Granik, the winner of the Grand Jury Prize for best dramatic feature at the Sundance Film Festival in 2010 and nominated

for four Academy Awards including Best Picture. She has served in various producing capacities on films like the cult comedy SMILEY FACE, directed by Gregg Araki and starring Anna Faris, MARRIED LIFE, directed by Ira Sachs and starring Rachel McAdams and Pierce Brosnan, CLEANER, directed by Renny Harlin, starring Samuel L. Jackson and Ed Harris, Neil LaBute's YOUR FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS, starring Ben Stiller and Natassja Kinski, and CASE 39, directed by Christian Alvert, starring Renee Zellweger. Madigan-Yorkin also produced SUNDAY, directed by Jonathan Nossiter, winning The Grand Jury Prize for best dramatic feature and the Waldo Salt Screenwriting Award in the 1997 Sundance Film Festival. Most recently, Madigan-Yorkin produced GIRL MOST LIKELY starring Kristen Wiig and Annette Bening and directed by Shari Berman and Bob Pulcini, which will be released in July.

Currently, Madigan-Yorkin is a staff producer for Anonymous Content, a multimedia company based in Los Angeles that produced BABEL, ETERNAL SUNSHINE OF THE SPOTLESS MIND, and FIFTY FIRST DATES. She has served at various companies before her current position at Anonymous Content, including Propaganda Films, Skouras Pictures and Avenue Entertainment.

Christopher Tricarico - Producer / Production Legal

Christopher Tricarico is a founding partner of Tricarico Chavez LLP, a full service law firm in Los Angeles concentrating in the entertainment and media industries. He represents individual and institutional clients in various transactions in connection with all aspects of the development, production, financing, and distribution of motion pictures, television programming, music videos, video games, music, animation, publishing and other entertainment content. His clients range from independent production companies, producers, writers, rights holders to major studios and include Anonymous Content, Scott Free Productions, Paper Street Films, The Estate of Philip K. Dick and The Walt Disney Company. He has worked in the realm of independent films for more than 20 years, currently serving as an advisor to the Sundance Institute and the Sundance Creative Producing Fellowship and Lab. Tricarico received a BA in English and Journalism from the University of Southern California, a master's in Journalism from Columbia University, and a law degree from the University of Pennsylvania.

Sabine Sidawi Hamdan- Co Producer / Line Producer

Sabine Sidawi heads Orjouane Productions, a Beirut-based production company created in 2007. Managing all aspects of production, Sidawi Hamdan has overseen films shot throughout the region, including Lebanon, Jordan and Syria. Her past credits as line producer, executive producer and co-producer include Dima El Horr's EVERYDAY IS A HOLIDAY; Maher Abi Samra's WE WERE COMMUNIST; Danielle Arbid's BEYROUTH HOTEL, The LOST MAN and IN THE BATTLEFIELDS; Josef Fares' ZOZO; and Olivier Assayas' CARLOS.

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