



WADJDA

Autumn
Season
2013

Release: 2012

Cert (UK): PG

Runtime: 97 mins

Director: Haifaa Al-Mansour

Screenwriter: Haifaa Al-Mansour

Cast: Waad Mohammed, Reem Abdullah

Language: Arabic with English subtitles

'There's a lot more going on in this first feature film from Saudi Arabia, where movie theaters are banned, than the deceptively simple story of a girl who's willing to do just about anything to buy her first bicycle.

Even if that were all there was to it, though, "Wadjda" would still be a must-see.

A groundbreaking film in more ways than one, "Wadjda," which finds a sneakily innocuous way to address the severe constraints placed on women in Saudi society, was also written and directed by a woman. Haifaa Al-Mansour, who also directed the 2005 documentary "Women without Shadows," reports that she resorted at times to directing the action with a walkie-talkie from inside a van to avoid stirring up controversy by giving male crew members orders while shooting outdoors.'

So says Bruce Ingram in the Chicago Sun-Times. The story follows Wadjda, a 10 year-old middle class girl who cannot understand the constraints on her life that the Saudi laws enforce. Being forced to cover up in public she is used to, but why can she not ride a bicycle? Like all young children the world over she finds rules, especially unfair rules, hard to bear, so she rebels; she wears western sneakers under her black robes. When she asks for a bike and is refused, she decides to try to earn the money herself to buy it. As we shall see, even that is not allowed...



The film takes on the repressed role of women in Saudi Arabia, but in a gentle way that tries to teach rather than preach. Haifaa Al-Mansour understands her groundbreaking role as both the first director of an all-Saudi movie and the first female director, but wants to show her fellow Saudis that there are better ways, rather than *'ram it down their throats'*. As reported above, she had to resort to some clever ways to get the film produced (hiding in vans, etc) but she is now living in Bahrain and can speak openly.

The film has had good reviews from its limited showings, mainly at festivals, and has won several awards at these around the world. These include 'Best International Independent Film' at the British Independent Film Awards 2013; the 'Norwegian Peace Film Award' at Tromso Festival 2013 and Best newcomers Film award at Venice 2012.

