



Presents

# CAPERNAUM

**A film by Nadine Labaki**  
120 mins, Lebanon, 2018  
Language: Arabic with English Subtitles

**Official Selection:**  
2018 Cannes Film Festival – Competition

## **Distribution**

Mongrel Media Inc  
1352 Dundas St. West  
Toronto, Ontario, Canada, M6J 1Y2  
Tel: 416-516-9775 Fax: 416-516-0651  
E-mail: [info@mongrelmedia.com](mailto:info@mongrelmedia.com)  
[www.mongrelmedia.com](http://www.mongrelmedia.com)

 @MongrelMedia

## **Publicity**

Bonne Smith  
Star PR  
Tel: 416-488-4436  
Twitter: @starpr2  
E-mail: [starpr@sympatico.ca](mailto:starpr@sympatico.ca)

 /MongrelMedia

## **CAPERNAUM**

### **The Cast**

Zain	ZAIN AL RAFEEA
Rahil	YORDANOS SHIFERAW
Yonas	BOLUWATIFE TREASURE BANKOLE
Souad	KAWTHAR AL HADDAD
Selim	FADI KAMEL YOUSSEF
Sahar	CEDRA IZAM
Aspro	ALAA CHOUCNIEH
The Judge	ELIAS KHOURY
Nadine	NADINE LABAKI
Assaad	NOUR EL HUSSEINI
Cockroach Man/Harout	JOSEPH JIMBAZIAN
Daad	SAMIRA CHALHOUB
Maysoun	FARAH HASNO
TV Presenter	JOE MAALOUF

### **The Filmmakers**

Director	NADINE LABAKI
Produced by	KHALED MOUZANAR
Screenplay	NADINE LABAKI JIHAD HOJEILLY MICHELLE KESERWANY
in collaboration with with the participation of	GEORGES KHABBAZ KHALED MOUZANAR
Original Music	KHALED MOUZANAR
Director of Photography	CHRISTOPHER AOUN
Editors	KONSTANTIN BOCK LAURE GARDETTE

Original Music KHALED MOUZANAR

Art Director HUSSEIN BAYDOUN

Costume Designer ZEIN SAAB DE MELERO

Casting Director JENNIFER HADDAD

1<sup>st</sup> Assistant Director TOUFIC KHREICH

Sound Designer CHADI ROUKOZ

Sound Mix EMMANUEL CROSET  
MATTHIEU TERTOIS

Line Producers PIERRE SARRAF  
MARIANNE KATRA

Producer MICHEL MERKT

Executive Produced by AKRAM SAFA

Co-Producer PIERRE SARRAF

Executive Producer ANNE-DOMINIQUE TOUSSAINT

Executive Produced by JASON KLIOT  
JOANA VICENTE

Executive Producers FOUAD MIKATI  
CANDICE ABELA  
SAMER & AYL A RIZK  
GEORGES SARRAF  
SYLVIO SHARIF TABET

Executive Producers RAY BARAKAT  
CHADI ELI MATTAR  
ANTOINE KHALIFÉ

Executive Producers JOSLYN BARNES  
DANNY GLOVER  
SUSAN ROCKEFELLER  
WISSAM SMAYRA  
ASSAAD DEBS

## Synopsis

Winner of the Grand Jury Prize at the Cannes Film Festival, Nadine Labaki's CAPERNAUM ("Chaos") tells the story of Zain (Zain al Raffeia), a Lebanese boy who sues his parents for the "crime" of giving him life.

CAPERNAUM follows Zain as he journeys from gutsy, streetwise child to hardened 12-year-old "adult": fleeing his abusive, negligent parents, surviving through his wits on the streets, taking care of Ethiopian refugee Rahil (Yordanos Shiferaw) and her baby son Yonas (Boluwatife Treasure Bankole), being jailed for a violent crime, and finally, seeking justice in a courtroom.

CAPERNAUM was made with a cast of non-professionals playing characters whose lives closely parallel their own. Following her script, Labaki placed her performers in scenes and asked them to react spontaneously with their own words and gestures. When the non-actors' instincts diverged from the written script, Labaki adapted the screenplay to follow them.

While steeped in the quiet routines of ordinary people, CAPERNAUM is a film with an expansive palette: without warning it can ignite with emotional intensity, surprise with unexpected tenderness, and inspire with flashes of poetic imagery.

Although it is set in the depths of a society's systematic inhumanity, CAPERNAUM is ultimately a hopeful film that stirs the heart as deeply as it cries out for action.

# # #

## CAPERNAUM

### **Writer/Director Nadine Labaki**

Nadine Labaki was born in Lebanon, and grew up during the years of civil war. She received her degree in Audiovisual Studies in 1997 from Beirut's Saint-Joseph University. After graduation, she immediately moved into directing television commercials and music videos for popular artists in the region. These garnered her several awards.

In 2005, Labaki participated in the Cannes Film Festival Residence to write CARMEL, her first feature film, which was set in Beirut. She directed and took a lead role in the film, which premiered at Cannes' Directors' Fortnight in 2007 and won the Youth Jury Award, as well as the Audience Award at San Sebastian Film Festival. CARMEL was released theatrically in over 60 countries. In 2008, she received the Insignia of Chevalier in the Order of Arts and Letters from the French Ministry of Culture.

Nadine's second feature, WHERE DO WE GO NOW?, which she again wrote, directed and starred in, also premiered at Cannes in 2011 in the *Un Certain Regard* category, and won a Special Mention from the Ecumenical Jury. It went on to win the Cadillac People's Choice Award at the Toronto International Film Festival, and the Audience Award at San Sebastian Film

Festival, before screening at Sundance in 2012. WHERE DO WE GO NOW? was nominated for Best Foreign Film by the Los Angeles Film Critics Association Awards and is Lebanon's highest-grossing Arabic film to date.

In 2014, Nadine wrote and directed "O Milagre," a segment of the RIO, I LOVE YOU anthology film in the "Cities of Love" series. She also starred in the film opposite Harvey Keitel.

As an actor, Labaki starred in MEA CULPA for French director Fred Cavayé; LA RANÇON DE LA GLOIRE for French director Xavier Beauvois; STRAY BULLET for Lebanese director Georges Hachem; and ROCK THE CASBAH, for Moroccan director Laïla Marrakchi.

# # #

## About the Cast

**ZAIN AL RAFEEA (Zain)** was born on October 10, 2004, in the Eastern Mliha, Daraa, Syria, the second son of Ali Al Rafeea and Nour Al Hoda Al Saleh.

Zain has not had a right to education since 2012, due to the military confrontations of the Syrian Civil War. That year, as the situation became unbearable for his parents and his four children, the eldest being eight at the time, the family moved to Lebanon.

Zain couldn't adapt to the educational system in Beirut so instead he has received inconsistent home-tutoring. Although his father hasn't asked him to, he has worked in a number of temporary jobs since he was ten, including supermarket deliveries. His real passion is raising pigeons, and his dream is to open a pigeon shop, although he would like to continue acting.

In August of 2018, Zain and his family were relocated by the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) to Hammerfest, Norway.

**YORDANOS SHIFERAW (Rahil)** was born in Asmara, the capital of Eritrea, sometime between the late 80s and the early 90s. As a child, she spent time in a refugee camp in Debre Zeyit, Ethiopia, after her mother died on the long and arduous journey made on foot. She lived with her father briefly before he died of an old war injury.

In the years that followed, she was separated from her four sisters and found herself constantly displaced. She didn't receive an education and was forced very early into living an adult life, working as a shoeshine girl and human parking meter when she was homeless.

Around age of 20, she found two of her sisters working as live-in maids in Beirut. She too was employed as a maid until she fled her employer and continued to live and work illegally in the country.

Like her character, Shiferaw was arrested as an illegal immigrant during the shoot, and jailed for two weeks before being released. Nadine Labaki and Khaled Mouzanar went through the process of officially sponsoring her so she could stay legally in Lebanon.

Since the showing of CAPERNAUM at Cannes, she has moved to Paris.

**BOLUWATIFE TREASURE BANKOLE (Yonas)** was born on November 21, 2015 at Abou Jaoude Hospital, Jall Ed Dib, Mount-Lebanon.

Treasure's father, Oluyemi Damilola Bankole from Nigeria, met her mother, Rosemary Karanjo, from Kenya, in 2014 in Beirut. Both parents had arrived in Lebanon on cleaning contracts,

## CAPERNAUM

however her father ended up DJing in the underground African scene, while her mother stayed at home to take care of their daughter. The family moved constantly, fleeing the racism they encountered. In 2015, they moved to Nabaa, Beirut, where Treasure was discovered by CAPERNAUM casting director Jennifer Haddad in 2016.

In late 2016, during the shoot, Treasure's parents were arrested for lacking papers at the same time the character Yonas lost his mother in the film. The film crew stepped up, approaching General Security to bail them out and allow them time to leave the country safely. As her situation was impossible in Lebanon as an immigrant without papers, Treasure and her mother went back to Kenya, where, through the intercession of Nadine Labaki and the UNHRC, she will be able to go to school and get health care. She and her mother still remain separated from her father, who returned to Nigeria. Nadine Labaki, through the help of the UNHRC, is working on reuniting them.

**KAWTHAR AL HADDAD (Souad, Zain's Mother)** was born in Wadi Khaled, Tripoli, Lebanon. She moved with her parents and six siblings to Kuwait where her father died in 1975. The family returned to Beirut in 1990 during the invasion of Kuwait.

In 1999, she married Yasser Issa who, like her, has not been granted full identification documents. Even though she was born in Lebanon, she holds a second-grade Lebanese ID and is treated as a second-class citizen. Al Haddad have been struggling unsuccessfully for years to register her two sons, Hussein and Mohamad, so they can get access to education, healthcare, and immunization.

Al Haddad hoped to stay and school and one day become a doctor, had to drop out of school to help her mother at home. She has worked as a housekeeper, among other low-income jobs, in order to provide for her family.

CAPERNAUM's casting director found her while she was taking care of her brother's orphaned children in Wata el Msaytbeh, Beirut

**FADI KAMEL YOUSSEF (Selim, Zain's Father)** was born in Tareeq El jdide in Beirut. His parents' divorce left him troubled and rootless throughout his teenage years. He dropped out of Al Makassed school in the 5th grade.

In 1994, his leg was injured in a motorcycle accident and he attempted suicide after receiving the hospital bill, which he was unable to pay for. Youssef has had many jobs since the age of eleven, including taxi driver for twelve years and, most recently, café owner in Tareeq El jdide,

where he currently lives. “I am an ambassador of the poor. I often slept on rooftops, and on the rocks in Ramlet El Bayda,” he said during his casting interview.

During the war of 2006, Fadi married Hayat and in 2014 they had their first baby, Habiba.

In the summer of 2017, after the film shoot was completed, Youssef was inspired to change his life and went into rehab at Oum El Nour Center in Sehayleh, Lebanon.

**CEDRA IZAM (Sahar)** was born in 2004 in Al-Ashrafia, Aleppo, Syria.

She came to Lebanon with her parents and four siblings in 2012 and settled in Ouzai, Beirut. In 2014, her older sister Sossi drowned in the sea. In 2016, her mother gave birth to a baby girl whom the parents also named Sossi.

Cedra, who used to attend school in Syria, was not able to do so in Beirut, when her father, who is in Lebanon illegally, and suffers from depression, forced her to work on the streets selling gum. After the film, Labaki, with the help of the UNHRC, got Cedra and all her siblings back in school. The UNHRC is also following up with Cedra’s father to help him get back in the workforce again.

**ALAA CHOUCNIEH (Aspro)** was born on in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.

Chouchnieh grew up in Yemen until he moved to Beirut during the Yemeni war of 1990. He holds dual Palestinian/Lebanese nationality.

In Lebanon, he repeated his classes at the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) school until the 4th grade when his parents took him out when they could no longer afford it. He was involved with a political party in which he worked as a personal guard until he was sold out by its commanders, arrested and imprisoned for five years.

“I have more arrest warrants than a tree has leaves,” he told CAPERNAUM’s casting director. In 2018, Chouchnieh opened a food and beverage kiosk in Ard Jalloul, Beirut.

# # #

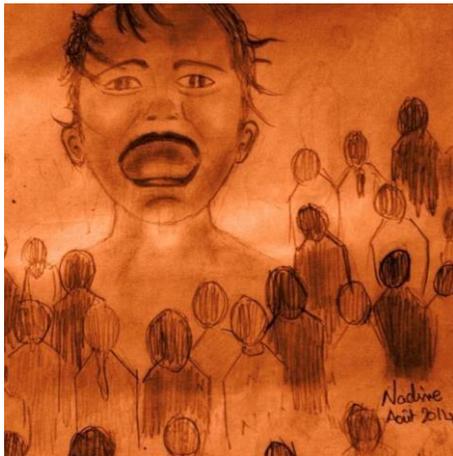
## **CAPERNAUM**

### **About the Production**

Driving home one night, Nadine Labaki stopped for a red light and saw a woman and a one-year-old baby boy sitting on a traffic island. “The little boy couldn’t sleep,” she remembers.

“Every time he would doze off, he would wake up again. And it hit me. The only place where this kid is going to experience life is this half a meter of concrete between two highways. It’s all he knows.

And if he ever tries to leave it, he’ll probably be hit by a car.”



When Labaki came home, she drew the face of a child with his mouth agape, shouting at group of adults standing in front of him. She captioned it: ‘I’m sorry! I quit! I don’t want to be here! I don’t belong in your world! I don’t want to breathe, eat, play, learn, laugh or dream! I don’t want to grow up to become like you! You have failed me!’”

Although Labaki had not begun writing the script for CAPERNAUM, her drawing looks eerily like Zain Al Rafeea, the boy she would eventually cast as her lead.

While this idea sparked CAPERNAUM, it wasn’t the only inspiration. “Lebanon was filled with refugees at that time, and you could see kids on the streets everywhere,” says CAPERNAUM producer and composer Khaled Mouzanar, who is also Labaki’s co-writer and husband. “As a mother, pregnant with our second child, I felt her maternal instinct was very strong, and I knew she wanted to say something about kids being mistreated and in need of love and care.”

Mouzanar, who collaborates with Labaki on her scripts, started brainstorming with her about the things that bothered her most, and encouraged her to write them all down on a whiteboard.

“Where did the system fail these kids?” says Labaki “Why do we as a society allow this sort of injustice to happen? The migrant workers’ situation in Lebanon; the absurdity of the notion of frontiers; the absurdity that you need a paper to prove that you exist—all these subjects together were things I was exploring and thinking about.” When Labaki looked at the board, she immediately thought of a French word, *capharnaïm* (in English, *capernaum*) “Originally it was the name of a village in Palestine,” she says. “But later on, in French literature, they started using it to signify chaos. It means everything is upside down and in complete disorder. The title was the first thing that came to my mind. I had the title before I wrote one word of the script.”

Interestingly, the original Biblical meaning of the word was about a place that was cursed, but

also a place where miracles could happen. “That’s what’s going on in the world right now,” says Labaki. “It’s a mixture of chaos and miracles every day.”

Labaki understood that if she was going to voice the concerns of these lost children, she had a lot of learning to do. Along with Mouzanar and her co-screenwriters Jihad Hojeilly and Michelle Keserwany, Labaki started visiting some of the darkest places in Lebanon: children’s detention centers, prisons for minors, and courtrooms. “I was trying to understand what they felt, who they are.” Mouzanar doesn’t like to refer to what the group was doing as “research.” “I don’t like to call it that because it’s very technical,” he says. “We were very emotionally involved with these kids.”

Says Labaki: “I saw kids who are so neglected, so abused that there’s nothing anymore in their eyes,” says Labaki. “These children don’t laugh, don’t cry, and don’t play. If you put a toy in front of them, they don’t touch it. They are just numb. There’s no more childhood in their eyes. After seeing these kids many times, when they started to have a trusting relationship with me, I used to ask them, ‘Are you happy to be alive?’ Ninety-nine percent of the kids answered ‘no.’ They told me: ‘I’m not happy to be here.’ ‘Why am I here when there’s no one to take care of me?’ ‘Why am I here if I’m going to be hungry all the time?’ They have the feeling that they’re here because they are being punished for something.”

When she felt she had enough investigation behind her, Labaki began writing with Mouzanar and co-writers Hojeilly and Keserwany. Hojeilly is a photographer who Nadine became close friends with when they were film students at Beirut’s Saint-Joseph University and has collaborated on the screenplays of all her subsequent films. Keserwany is a socially committed artist and singer/songwriter, who makes music videos performing with her sister Noel. “I was at Nadine’s place and she told me a scene about a migrant worker getting off a bus and reaching her home where we see her baby was left alone,” says Keserwany. “I was intrigued and so I asked her, ‘What happens next?’ And she replied, ‘We’ll need to see.’ That’s how I got involved in writing the film. It took me some time to realize that we were actually writing a feature film and it was going to take two and a half incredible years to finish it.”

It was from these conversations that Labaki developed the film's central premise of a boy suing his parents for giving him life. Legally speaking, this is not something that can actually happen in Lebanon, as a child can't sue his guardians. Still, Labaki felt that this storyline was essential. "For me, symbolically, the idea of a kid suing his parents is the only way to make his voice resonate," says Labaki. "I wanted to translate his anger and to make him able to confront the system. The only way was through the court and through him saying, 'Enough!'"

Having spent so much time with the real people that she would be portraying in *CAPERNAUM*, Labaki decided that she couldn't make the film she envisioned with professional actors. "I wanted to find people where there is very little difference between them and the character. And then I wanted to ask them to go on their raw instinct and just *be*." Labaki's starting concept was to give her cast the basic outlines of a scene and let them take it from there: use their own words and gestures, say whatever they feel like saying, and not limit themselves to where the scene was supposed to go. "This is a real story of real people who you see every day on the streets, but you don't really look at them. I'm aiming for how the audience feels as a viewer, and if they just look at them as 'characters,' I would feel like I had failed. I want them to be wondering 'Is this a real actor, or is this somebody who's been picked up and asked to be the character, using their own life experience?' I wanted the audience to have this sort of perplexed situation where they really don't know."

Mouzanar realized that Labaki's vision could not be accommodated by a conventional film production's approach, with a set shooting schedule, planned locations, and budget. She would need to take as much time as necessary to get the performances she wanted out of her cast, as well as the freedom to shoot when and wherever she wanted to shoot. "I needed the freedom to not have everything scheduled and structured in a way that would paralyze me," says Labaki. As this setup was something that no producer was likely to accept, Mouzanar decided to produce *CAPERNAUM* himself, even though he had never produced a film before.

Things got off to a sudden start when they discovered a jail they wanted to shoot in was going to close in two weeks. At that point, they hadn't even set up a production company. "I told Nadine, 'Let's bring some cameras in and shoot,'" says Mouzanar. "And that's what we did. From that point on, we couldn't stop. I found myself thrown into this world without knowing anything

about it. Very quickly, I ran out of money, but I didn't let Nadine know because I wanted to protect her. I mortgaged our home and I didn't pay my son's school fees for two semesters, because I was paying for the film." Gradually, Mouzanar secured funding with a bank and persuaded numerous producers to invest.

The ultimate success of Labaki's project rested on finding the right person to play the film's lead character. "I asked casting director Jennifer Haddad and her team to find a kid who is 12-years-old, but looks younger than 12 years old because he's malnourished," says Labaki. "He has to be street-smart, he has to use foul language because he's been on the streets, and he has to have sadness in his eyes, because he has seen a lot. While I was talking to her, I thought, 'I'm asking for a miracle. How are we ever going to find this kid?' Haddad had previously been impressed with the young Syrian immigrant Zain Al Rafeea when she encountered him while casting a TV show, so she was excited to go back and search for him again. She and her staff went to Zain's neighborhood and saw 70 boys, but by the end of the day she didn't find Zain or anybody else who interested her. As she was about to give up, Zain jumped up on another kid's shoulders. "I took him aside and interviewed him on the spot," says Haddad. "I went back and told Nadine I found the kid and she said, 'HaHaHa! Don't be so sure!'" Haddad realized it was too early to finalize the decision, but both she and Labaki had an instinct that they had found their lead. "In her video interview, Jennifer asked him, 'Do you think you're clever?' and the way he answered the question 'Not really' really did it for me," says Labaki. "I was sure it was him. I was sure I had found my miracle." Still, it took two months of meeting and auditioning other boys to be sure. There were many other good candidates, but none had his strong personality or were as natural on camera. "Zain is a guy who is tough, and gets in trouble a lot," says Al Rafeea. "I'm like that, I get in a lot of fights, I'm not afraid of anything, I curse when I'm mad, and I also don't go to school, but he is a criminal, which I am not." Because the fictional Zain is based so closely on the personality of the real Zain, Labaki has difficulty separating them: "The only thing that saves Zain from the living conditions he's in is that he has loving parents, who don't want him to work, and want him to go to school."

Finding someone to play CAPERNAUM's other lead character, a refugee mother named Rahil, was especially challenging because Labaki wanted to cast somebody who was actually illegal, so

she would fully understand the life. Unfortunately, women who are in the country illegally are hesitant to talk to outsiders. Often they would simply walk past casting director Haddad when approached, or gave phony numbers, or wouldn't show up for auditions. This went on for over a month until Haddad spotted Yordanos Shiferaw. "She smiled at me, which was a blessing after all the frowns I got," says Haddad. "She reassured me that she was very excited by the film's story and that I should call her back." Unfortunately, Haddad lost her number. "I almost cried and the next two weeks felt like forever, until I spotted Yordanos again in a completely different area. I immediately felt that if she was placed right there at that moment for me to see, then she must be Rahil. She crossed over and said, 'it's so nice to see you again. I waited for your call.'" Yordanos had just lost her job and had time to talk. When she said that she had lost her parents at a very young age, Haddad took a photo with her phone as a ray of light lit up her tears. She sent the image to Labaki while she was still interviewing her. Yordanos Shiferaw was the right age and had the perfect blend of dignity, humanity and strength. Once Labaki determined through auditions that Shiferaw had the ability to convey her life story through actions and emotions, she knew that she had found her Rahil. "The only difference between Yordanos and Rahil is that Yordanos doesn't have a baby in real life," says Labaki. "She's been living in Lebanon illegally for a very long time. She cleans houses. She cleans hotels. She cleans toilets. She washes dishes. She's been through a lot in her life. You can see it in her eyes. She's faced racism, a lot of injustice, and she's been mistreated in numerous ways. She is very strong, a survivor, and a warrior, and at the same time, very fragile." Three days after playing a scene of being arrested in the film, Yordanos was actually arrested for not having an ID card and spent two weeks in jail, before Labaki and Mouzanar were able to get her out. Remembering the scene of her arrest during the Cannes Film Festival press conference, Shiferaw said, eyes brimming with tears: "When my character cries in the movie, it was me crying. Everything you see in the movie is my real life."

Rahil's son Yonas was cast with a baby girl, one-year-old Boluwatife "Treasure" Bankole. "I fell in love with Treasure as soon as I met her and it was impossible for me to think of another kid," says Labaki. "At the same time I didn't want to change the character to a girl. I wanted to keep the relationship between a boy and a boy because it was important to me that they identify with each other." Treasure turned out to be well named, as she was a constant blessing for the

production. “Sometimes in a movie you have to stop for an entire day because a baby is not in the right mood,” says Labaki. “Treasure is a very clever child. Sometimes she would do exactly the same steps the same way. We used to look at each other and we couldn’t believe what she just did.” Still, Nadine wanted to film Treasure sleeping and eating, not an easy thing to get a baby to do on command. “There are scenes where she’s searching for the breast of her mother to eat and she touches the breast of Zain,” says Mouzanar. “This takes a lot of time to happen. Hours and hours of waiting. Really, you’re like a hunter.” Before making the film, Zain was not fond of babies, including his sisters. “I think they’re obnoxious and cry a lot,” he says. But he truly liked Treasure and learned from Nadine and Yordanos how to take care of her. During the shooting, Treasure’s parents were arrested and jailed for three weeks, and casting director Haddad had to care for her until Mouzanar and Labaki succeeded in getting them released.

When Labaki began her research she was judgmental and angry about parents who would have kids they couldn’t take care of. But as she spent time with real people, her perception evolved. “It would take me ten minutes with a mother or a father before my heart would be torn apart by saying something or waking me up. ‘How do I dare to judge these people when I’ve never been in their situation?’ I was on a rollercoaster of emotions all the time. I wanted to portray that. I wanted to destabilize the judgment of the viewer and put them in a place where they don’t know who’s right or wrong.” When Kawthar al Haddad (Zain’s mother) and Fadi Kamel Youssef (his father) worked, they were aware of the characters they were playing, but what they actually said came directly out of their experiences. “When Fadi says, ‘I don’t know better than this. That’s how I was raised. I don’t know anything else.’ It’s really him saying it,” says Labaki. “All I did was put him in the situation.” Likewise, when Kawthar al Haddad speaks about not having the money to register her children, it isn’t something that was written in the script, but something that came directly from her own experience. “All her life she has struggled to get her two sons an ID, and hasn’t been able to succeed, so they have no nationality and no access to education or health care,” says Mouzanar.

There were always two cameras on the set. One was director of photography Christopher Aoun’s shooting camera and the other was recording the production for a future behind the scenes documentary film. (The second camera also filled in as a B-camera for the film when necessary.)

As the spaces were often small and Labaki wanted full 360 degrees freedom of movement, there were no light fixtures or cables allowed in the locations. Aoun used mirrors to reflect light in from outside. When it was time to film, there were only Labaki, the two cameramen, the boom operator, and the performers. While a copy of a very structured screenplay was always on set, Labaki never carried it with her. She never called “action,” as she didn’t want to alert her performers to a difference between normal life and filming. Labaki would talk to her performers about what the scene was about and Aoun and second cameraman Marco Müller would use their judgment about when it was time to roll. “I threw my actors in the situation, and then I just captured them,” she says. “We were open to whatever life was going to give us on top of the story that was written, and it was always like that the whole time. It wasn’t about acting or action, it was about *capturing* whatever was happening every time. I wanted to remember what I was witnessing. Every time, I wished I could almost *eat* the moment, so I could keep it with me and not forget it in any way, and, as much as I could, portray it exactly the way I saw it. I didn’t analyze anything, I did things instinctively, and I trusted my instinct to take me to the right path, until everything would fall into place at the right moment.” Mouzanar says that Labaki has a natural ability to make people feel at ease and feel natural in front of camera. He thinks an important part of that is because she also plays the role of a lawyer in CAPERNAUM. “Because she is also an actress in the film,” he says, “the actors felt that she was one of them, someone who could give the pace from inside the scene, not outside.”

Labaki and Mouzanar live on the third floor of a building in Beirut, and as the first floor was unrented, they took it for their production office. Nearly everything from the writing of the screenplay, to the first reading, to editing, post-production, music and mix was accomplished in those two apartments. Mouzanar refers to the film as a “home birth.” As everybody was working at such close quarters, the production became like a family affair. Most of the crew was very young and relatively inexperienced in film, something that Labaki saw as a positive thing. “We were all working out of passion,” she says. “That’s how we were able to shoot for so long.”

Aside from the scenes in the jail that had to be filmed first, the film was shot in chronological order. The cast essentially experienced it day by day as the filming proceeded, from the beginning until the courtroom scenes. By the time of the courtroom scenes, Zain and Treasure had literally grown, becoming bigger and taller, and Zain’s hair was much longer. “The cast

grew not only physically, but also emotionally during the six months,” says Labaki. “It struck me how well these people now knew their stories, because they’d lived in it for so long,” says Labaki. “They remembered every single detail of what they did, and they figured out the life story of their characters. It was so obvious how much they had grown, like a puzzle that comes to life all of a sudden, and each piece of the puzzle goes into its right place.”

Labaki staged the talk show scene in the studio of a real Lebanese TV host named Joe Maalouf, while Zain waited in another house for Maalouf to phone him. Labaki phoned Zain in advance to talk through the scene, but after that, he was on his own. By this point in the shooting, Zain’s indepth knowledge of his character was so highly developed that it really fueled his improvisatory skills. “I got very excited that day,” says Zain, “and I started throwing all kinds of lines up and down without always realizing what I was saying.”

In addition to producing and collaborating on the screenplay, Mouzanar was also the composer of CAPERNAUM, as he has been for all of Labaki’s films. His initial thoughts were to write emotional, melodic themes related to each main character. “When we started shooting, with these kids not acting, but living their reality, I felt those kinds of melodies didn’t work,” he says. “The melodies seemed to be lying about them. I didn’t want to add a layer of lies above these people.”

At one point, Mouzanar even removed all the music he’d written, but eventually they found a balance. “What Nadine and I decided was to use music in certain poetic places where Nadine’s cinematic language changes and she allows herself to do some slow motion or some flashbacks or some ellipse that didn’t fit the language of the more realistic approach she used the rest of the time.”

As there was over 500 hours of footage shot during the six months, the editing took a year and a half to do. The first cut was twelve hours long. A lot of the most interesting parts of the story had to be removed as Labaki and editors Konstantin Bock and Laure Gardette painstakingly carved the movie down to feature length for its showing at Cannes. Following the festival screenings, Labaki trimmed the film further, taking care not to compromise its meditative, unhurried pace.

“It is important to me that you feel a sense of time passing by,” she says. “Even with the seasons. It starts in summer, and at some point it starts raining, and then later on it’s cold and you see them wearing coats.”

A production process like CAPERNAUM’s could never have been conceived before the age of video, where the cost of rolling cameras for six months is relatively insignificant compared to all the other costs of production. “After all my research, I could have done a documentary,” Labaki says, “but it was important for me to write a fiction that gathered all the stories I heard together into one story, treating them in a way that it looks real, so you don’t feel the fiction and you don’t feel the intervention of the writers and the director. My goal was to use the film as a vehicle for reality and to divert it into the fiction we wrote.”

It’s possible that when filmmakers are able to see the documentary about the making of CAPERNAUM, her unique method might become an inspiration for future films, pushing forward a tradition that dates back to the Italian neo-realist films of the 40s. “Cinema has to go in this direction,” says Labaki. “It’s a natural path. Fiction is mostly about ‘make believe,’ but I don’t think that cinema should only ‘make believe.’ Cinema should be more than that.”

CAPERNAUM may be set in Lebanon, but its concerns are global. “When I started plunging into this universe, I changed my perception of what the film was,” says Mouzanar. “Suddenly it appeared to me like a futuristic movie. It was like I was plunging into a MAD MAX style film. This city, this underground city, appeared to me like it could be the underground of Mexico or the underground of New Delhi or any big city in the world. In fifty years, with global warming, with migration from the south to the north, all the big cities in Europe will have this in their suburbs. This is not just something local. It’s really something that’s happening on Planet Earth, and that will be the future of every city in the world in the next half century.”

Labaki and Mouzanar are active in numerous political organizations in Beirut, including Beirut Madinati (“Beirut My City”), the volunteer-led grass roots campaign which won 40% of the votes in the last election. Labaki even began a run for Parliament with Beirut Madinati, getting far enough ahead in the polls that she could have won. “I think as a moviemaker she can be much more helpful than as a lawmaker,” says Mouzanar. “When she ran her aim was not to win

but to inspire people to take their destiny into their own hands, and not to give in to those corrupt politicians.”

Labaki is hopeful that CAPERNAUM can increase awareness and open up a debate about the conditions of these children. “The problem is that we don’t want to acknowledge it because the issue is so huge that we don’t know where to start,” she says. “There are a million things we can do, but there needs to be open debate before we can figure out how to implement real change, like changing the laws and implementing new ones. I don’t want to sound naïve in saying a film can change the world, but if it can change the way you look at these kids or you look at your life, it can at least make a change in *you*, as a person. And when you start looking at these issues in a different way, real change can start.” Says Mouzanar: “Nadine and I are realistic dreamers. These are two words that fight eternally against each other. But even if you know deep inside that you can’t change anything, you can continue to dream that you can. Humanity and progress is driven by dreamers, not cynics.”

After shooting ended, Labaki and Mouzanar continued their relationships with Zain and the other children in the film and are doing whatever they can to help them find better lives in the years to come. During the shoot, Labaki and Mouzanar brought members of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) in to meet with Zain and his family, and recently the UNHCR has arranged for their resettlement in Norway. “Zain’s father called me, crying,” says Labaki. “He told me, ‘Nadine, we’re going to have a two-story house.’ He couldn’t believe it. ‘We’re going to have four bedrooms.’ We don’t know yet if it will be a happy ending, because who knows what it will be like for them over there, but at least they’re going to have a normal life. Zain is going to go to school. He wants to pursue acting, so he needs to learn to read and write. When we started shooting, he barely knew how to read or write his name.” The UNHCR is also helping to improve the lives of Treasure and Cedra Izam, who plays Zain’s sister, Sahar. As living without papers in Lebanon was impossible, Treasure went back to Kenya, where she will be able to get an education and better healthcare. Cedra is no longer selling things on the streets like Sahar did. “It’s very complicated to help them because they don’t have legal status in Lebanon.” says Labaki. “We haven’t been able to find the ideal solutions yet. My hope is that everybody will be able to be resettled like Zain.”

CAPERNAUM concludes on a note of cautious optimism for Zain. “At the end of the film, Zain is smiling because he was able to raise his voice,” says Labaki. “He’s still going to be in prison, but he was able to make his voice heard. He’s registered now. He’s going to have a piece of paper with his name on it. Does that mean that all his worries are over? Of course not. But it’s just the small victory that gives you a small light at the end of the tunnel to keep you going.”

# # #

## CAPERNAUM

### About the Filmmakers

**KHALED MOUZANAR (Producer/Composer/Co-Screenwriter)** is a Lebanese music composer, songwriter and producer. His work is rooted in wide-ranging musical genres, including classical, jazz, Mediterranean, Middle Eastern, Brazilian Choro, and Argentinian Tango. He composed the music for all of his wife Nadine Labaki's films, including CAMEL (UCMF Award for Best Music at the 2008 Cannes Film Festival), WHERE DO WE GO NOW? (Best Music Award, 2011 Stockholm Film Festival), "O Milagre," her segment in the compilation feature RIO, I LOVE YOU.

In 2000, he established with Zeid Hamdan his first label, Mooz Records, through which he produced the majority of Beirut's underground music scene, including such groups as Soap Kills, Kitaa Beirut, The New Government, and RGB. In 2008, Mouzanar recorded "Les Champs Arides," his first solo album as a singer/songwriter. The following year, he composed the music for the opening ceremony of the Jeux de la Francophonie (an athletic/artistic event for mostly French-speaking nations), which was viewed by sixty million spectators worldwide.

One of Mouzanar's first professional experiences in cinema took place in 2005 with "After Shave," a French short film directed by Hany Tamba, which won the Cesar for Best Short Film in 2006.

**JIHAD HOJEILLY (Screenplay)** developed his passion for cinema at a very young age, from a local *ciné-club* to the VHS cassettes that he watched with his family in their apartment building during the war. When his studies and the war ended, he moved to Paris to study film. In 1993, while studying at Beirut's Saint-Joseph University, he met director Nadine Labaki, with whom he became very close. Together in 2006, they worked on writing her debut feature CAMEL. After the successful release of the film, they continued their writing collaboration with Labaki's second film, WHERE DO WE GO NOW?

In addition to screenwriting, Jihad Hojeily also works as a fashion photographer and publicist in Beirut.

**MICHELLE KESERWANY (Screenplay)** is a songwriter, musician, artist, screenwriter, and political activist from Lebanon.

At age 21, Keserwany released her first song, which was viewed more than a million times on YouTube. Since then, she teamed with her sister Noel to create many more songs, with lyrics that wittily critique the corruption and dysfunction of her home country. Their videos have all

become viral sensations, and the sisters have attracted a large and loyal fan base. They compose, write, perform, design, and illustrate their videos.

Keserwany is often invited to national and international talk shows to discuss her songs as well as her participation in various organizations and campaigns. Her causes include fighting to preserve Lebanon's public beaches and for the establishment of new independent political movements.

In 2017, the Paris Institute of Political Studies (aka Sciences Po) selected her to take part in their "Women of the Future in the Mediterranean" program in Paris.

Keserwany is currently working on her animated short film "Rou'ya," which she wrote with the support of the CNC in France. She is also developing her first feature screenplay.

She received her Master's Degree in Advertising and Graphic Design with Distinction from the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik in Mount Lebanon. She lives in Beirut.

**CHRISTOPHER AOUN (Director of Photography)** is a German-Lebanese cinematographer. Born in Beirut, he studied cinematography at the Munich Film school (HFF Munich).

His extensive work in documentary and fiction films, commercials, shorts, and music videos, have taken him all over the world. His recent feature credits include Philippe Aractingi's ISMAIL, and Franziska Schönenberger and Jayakrishnan Subramanian's KALVELI: SHADOWS OF THE DESERT. He also directed the short "Against Time: The Portrait of a Friend," his tribute to his 75-year-old former German teacher and cancer survivor.

Aoun lives in Berlin and Beirut with his husband, CAPERNAUM editor Konstantin Bock.

**KONSTANTIN BOCK (Editor)** is a director and editor, based in Berlin and Beirut. He studied applied film, theatre, and fine arts at the University of Hildesheim, and Jewish studies and the history and culture of the Middle East at the Freie Universität Berlin. He worked as an assistant director and stage manager for plays, opera, and dance and assisted on international feature and short films.

With the Canadian performance company Mammalian Diving Reflex, Bock worked as a director, designer and creative associate in Toronto, London, Bern, Singapore, Glasgow, Philadelphia, Prague, Copenhagen, Essen, Portland, Gwangju, Hemsbach, and Sydney.

Bock's film work includes commercials, music videos, short films, and documentaries. His most recent documentary, HATTIE GOES CRUISING, premiered at the 2015 New Orleans Film Festival, has toured to over thirty festivals worldwide including Hot Docs, BFI Flare, OutFest,

and Rooftop, and was nominated for the 2017 Iris Prize. He has directed and edited commercials with agencies and production houses in Berlin, Munich, Hamburg, London, Beirut, and New York. Bock is married to CAPERNAUM's director of photography, Christopher Aoun.

**LAURE GARDETTE (Editor)** first collaborated with Nadine Labaki in 2007 as the editor of her debut feature, CARMEL.

Born in Roanne, France, she studied film at Lyon University for five years and, in 1992, her cinematographic research project won the top Filippo Sacchi prize, awarded by the National Union of Italian Film Journalists (SNGCI).

Since 2000, Gardette has worked on over thirty fiction and documentary feature films. She frequently collaborates with François Ozon, (on POTICHE, IN THE HOUSE, YOUNG & BEAUTIFUL, THE NEW GIRLFRIEND, FRANTZ, DOUBLE LOVER, and BY THE GRACE OF GOD) as well as Maïwenn (PARDONNEZ-MOI, ALL ABOUT ACTRESSES, and the 2011 Cannes Jury Prize winner, POLISSE). Gardette received a César Award for Best Editing for Maïwenn's POLISSE and a nomination for Ozon's FRANTZ.

Her other films include: Cédric Khan's THE PRAYER, Grand Corps Malade and Mehdi Idir's PATIENTS, Franck Gastambide's Pattaya, Christian Carion's COME WHAT MAY, Valéria Bruni Tedeschi's A CASTLE IN ITALY, Régis Roinsard's POPULAIRE, Jérôme Bonnell's LA DAME DE TRÈFLE, and Marc Fitoussi's PARIS FOLLIES. She was a consulting editor on Neeraj Ghaywan's MASAAN (India-Fipresci Award and Special Prize in, A Certain Regard, Cannes 2015), and on OKA by Souleymane Cissé.

Gardette was awarded the *Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres* by the French Minister of Culture and Communication in 2017.

She lives and works in Paris.

**HUSSEIN BAYDOUN (Art Director)** is a production designer and scenographer based in Beirut. His work is characterized by its architectural and industrial approach, and he often utilizes raw materials like metal, concrete, and fiber into his designs.

In cinema, he has worked with Rashid Masharawi, Abbas Fadhel, Ghassan Salhab, Mai Masri, Robert Guédiguian, and Elia Suleiman, among others. He was the production designer of Ziad Doueri's THE INSULT, nominated for Best Foreign Language Film at the 2018 Academy Awards.

Baydoun has collaborated with many theater artists, including Issam Bou Khaled, Ahmed El Attar, and Sawsan Bou Khaled.

His work has been shown at numerous festivals, including the Cannes Film Festival, Venice Film Festival, Berlin Festespiele, Piccolo Teatro di Milano, Avignon Festival, Carthage Theatre Days (Tunisia), Europa Festival (Lisbon), Das der Welt (Berlin), and World Theatre Festival Shizuoka (Japan).

**ZEINA SAAB DE MELERO (Costumes)** is an actress, singer, production designer, costume designer, and restaurateur.

Born to a Lebanese father and a Spanish flamenco dancer and singer, de Melero spent her childhood between Beirut and Barcelona. Her grandmother was the Spanish singer Issa Pereira, and her grandfather was the actor Manuel de Melero, who appeared in many Spanish movies. Coming from a family of artists, she was drawn to the theatre, and acted in Lebanese plays directed by Roger Assaf, Sylvain Lhermitte, and Patrick Mohr. She also created the costumes for some of Issam Bou Khaled's plays.

De Melero also acted in such films as Michel Kammoun's FALAFEL, Yannis Ioannou's HI! AMERICA, Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige's AROUND THE PINK HOUSE, and the TV movie, "Algiers-Beirut: A Souvenir," directed by Merzak Allouache. She will soon be seen in two upcoming films: Michel Kammoun's BEIRUT HOLD'EM and Oualid Moanness's 1982.

She worked as a production designer in the advertising world for many years and was also a production designer on Jihane Chouaib's GO HOME.

She once had a Spanish restaurant called SOLEA in Beirut with her mother, where the offerings included home cooking and flamenco music performed by the owners.

De Melero studied at the University Saint-Joseph in Beirut and got her BA in Acting and Staging at IESAV. She is married to actor/screenwriter Said Serhan, and they have two children.

**JENNIFER HADDAD (Casting)** studied Audio Visual Studies at the Lebanese Academy of Fine Arts (ALBA) from which she graduated in 2010.

After graduation, Haddad worked in TV and advertising production as a freelancer. In 2011, after completing a three-month creative documentary program with The Danish Film Institute, she joined the Jay Walter Thompson Advertising agency as a producer, a position she remained in until 2015.

Haddad then entered the film industry, working on such films as Hadi Ghandour's THE TRAVELER (as a location manager) and Nadim Tabet's ONE OF THESE DAYS (second

assistant director), and Michel Kammoun’s upcoming BEIRUT HOLD’EM (associate location manager). She first worked as a casting director on the TV miniseries “Undocumented: Bidune Kaid—Interactive.”

Haddad continues to be involved in the lives of CAPERNAUM’s cast and crew, and she is part of the team working on a “Making of” documentary.

Born in 1989 to a family of painters (grandfather Alfred Alfred Maalouf and aunt Louana Maalouf), Haddad lives in Beirut.

# # #