



The Layalina Chronicle
Summer 2016

CONFESSIONS FROM THE WAR TAKES THE SPOTLIGHT

Layalina is currently in pre-production on our upcoming feature documentary, *Confessions from the War*. Seeking to prevent the spread of violent extremism across the region, the film combines the compelling personal stories of former fighters from the Lebanese Civil War (1975 - 1990) and analysis of the country's sectarian tensions, which have been exacerbated by the Syrian conflict next door.

While exposing the darkest of humanity in wartime, the film sets the stage for a truth and reconciliation process that never took place after the war ended. These former fighters wrestle with regret over their involvement in the war and many of them have sought redemption through helping others. Their ultimate message to today's youth is that violence is not the answer. A peaceful and diverse Lebanon -- and broader Middle East -- is possible if the root causes of the conflict are confronted and today's disenfranchised youth are able to resolve their differences.

The film is slated for production in the Fall of 2016 in

Beirut. *Confessions* is directed and produced by Layalina's President, Leon Shahabian and edited by Shawn Thompson. The film is executive produced by Leon Shahabian and by Richard Rahil El Khazen. *Confessions* is a Layalina Production in association with the International Center for Religion and Diplomacy.

You can contribute to this film by mailing a check to the address on the back of the *Chronicle*, or you can join our crowdfunding campaign by visiting: igg.me/at/confessionsfromthewar. Your tax deductible support will allow us to share these

“Of course, you cannot bring back to life someone that you killed, but if you can prevent one boy [from carrying] weapons -- this can help.

Assad Chaftari, *Confessions* castmember

powerful stories of regret, loss and ultimately hope to the next generation in Lebanon, and the broader Middle East. Contributors who donate \$25,000 will receive an Executive Producer credit in the film.

With regional conflicts spilling over the border and extremist groups like ISIL preying on vulnerable youth, Lebanon is once again on the brink of war. The urgency to share these stories has never been greater.

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

Friends,

In recent months Layalina has collaborated with a number of organizations for additional screenings of our award-winning film, *Yemeniettes*, which was honored as Official Selection to four new film festivals and received two new awards: the *Best of Fest Best Documentary* from High Falls Film Festival and the *Silver Award* from the Spotlight Documentary Film Awards. We are indeed grateful for the remarkable recognition this inspiring film has received, which reconfirms the powerful messaging potential for Layalina's "soft diplomacy" films.

Based on this programming success, we believe that Layalina is uniquely poised to make a valuable contribution to the goal of countering violent extremism by providing entertaining programs which address the concerns of audiences throughout the Middle East. For example, *Confessions from the War*, our newest film, which is currently in pre-production, is a compelling documentary that promotes a message of hope and envisages a path toward peace, using Lebanon as a proxy for today's conflict-torn Middle East. This program develops a powerful and searing story to drive home the need for a resolution of today's continuing conflicts and we expect to give it a wide distribution. An offer of fiscal sponsorship at the \$25,000 level (or above) would entitle the donor to be credited as an Executive Producer of the film. Please contact Leon or myself if you have an interest in becoming a fiscal sponsor of this new documentary.

Lastly, I wish to note that Layalina's mission could not continue without the bright minds behind it. In the *Chronicle* you will find our announcement of Mr. Bruce Sherman's appointment to the Board of Directors and a description of the Layalina Advisory Group which has been formed to help guide and enliven the Layalina message. For my part, I wish to add my public thanks to these talented and accomplished individuals for the willingness to invest their time and energy in support of our efforts to harness the power of film to help bridge the divide between the U.S. and the Arab world.

My warm regards and special thanks to each one of you – our key supporters.



Shannon Fairbanks

LAYALINA BOARD WELCOMES BRUCE SHERMAN



Layalina is delighted to announce the addition of Mr. Bruce Sherman to the Board of Directors. He brings with him a wealth of knowledge in the fields of broadcasting and media development. Mr. Sherman is founder and president of Sherman Media Group (SMG), LLC. Launched in February 2016 in Washington, DC, SMG designs and develops broadcast and digital media around the world.

For more than twenty years Mr. Sherman served in varying capacities as strategy, research, and business development lead at the US Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG). During this period, BBG's worldwide audiences grew from 85 million to 226 million with corresponding annual budget growth from \$425 million to \$740 million.

Mr. Sherman served as the architect and principal author of all BBG strategic plans from 2000 to 2015. Immediately following the events of 9/11, at the request of then-Senator Joe Biden, Mr. Sherman conceived Initiative 911, BBG's master plan for responding to violent extremism worldwide. Initiative 911 led to the creation of Radio Sawa and Alhurra TV (\$115 million) in Arabic for the 22 countries of the Middle East and multiplatform, multilingual 24/7 broadcasting to Afghanistan and Iran, and major expansions in Pakistan, Indonesia, and other countries. From 2012 to 2016, Mr. Sherman was senior director responsible for BBG's Office of Strategy and Development.

For five years prior to joining the BBG, Mr. Sherman was deputy director of Radio Marti, managing the day-to-day operations of the U.S. broadcasting service for Cuba, comprising a staff of 150 and an annual budget of \$12 million.

Mr. Sherman earned his master's degree in liberal arts at St. John's College in Annapolis, MD and Santa Fe, NM, and his bachelor's degree in political science and government at the University of Florida in Gainesville, FL. He did post-undergraduate studies in Spanish at La Universidad de los Andes and Universidad Javeriana in Bogotá, Colombia, and is a fluent Spanish speaker.

He and his wife Jane Tillinghast Sherman, a paintings conservator, have three children: Sam (20), Meredith (17), and Christopher (15).

Mr. Sherman says of his appointment to Layalina's Board of Directors, "I was privileged to meet Dick Fairbanks at the inception of Layalina, have long admired its work and respected the many talents of Leon Shahabian, and look forward now as a board member to help Shannon Fairbanks and the Layalina team build for the future."

GET TO KNOW: THE LAYALINA ADVISORY GROUP

The Layalina Advisory Group is comprised of some of the best and brightest minds in foreign policy, business, film, and law, among other fields. Their advice and counsel have been invaluable to the mission of Layalina.

MANAGING DIRECTOR, THE LAYALINA ADVISORY GROUP



Rayya Salem has proven herself an incredible asset to the efforts of Layalina since she became involved in October 2014. In the past year, she has contributed a significant amount of time, expertise and resources to further Layalina's mission to bridge the divide between the United States and the Arab world. She has graciously agreed to take on even more responsibility within the Layalina Advisory Group serving as its first-ever Managing Director.

Ms. Salem is a partner at Houston-based investment firm Williamsburg Enterprises, focusing on the development of commercial and retail properties in Texas. She has written in-depth special reports for Executive Magazine, the most highly-read English language magazine for business in the Middle East. Later, she worked for the Lebanese Embassy in the UK, where she assisted the Commercial Attaché in research and planning to increase bilateral trade between the two countries.

In Houston, Ms. Salem sits on the Emerging Leaders Roundtable at the James A Baker III Institute for Public Policy at Rice University. She continues to support the work of the American Lebanese Medical Association, which her father helped set up, and both the Lebanese American University and the American University of Beirut through their New York offices. Ms. Salem graduated from Rice University.

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YEMENIETTES CONTINUES TO MAKE WAVES



Journalist Kim Ghattas moderates a discussion between Layalina President, Leon Shahabian and Yemeniaty Founder, Sama'a Al-Hamdani at the Royal Embassy of the Netherlands.

Layalina's multiple award-winning documentary film *Yemeniettes* was invited to re-enter the festival circuit in recent months. The film, which follows a team of teenage girls who launch a business and defy the barriers of their traditional society, received Official Selection to four film festivals in six months: Carmel International Film Festival in Carmel, CA, where the film screened on opening night; Alexandria Film Festival in Alexandria, VA; High Falls Film Festival near Rochester, NY, where it won the *Best of the Fest Best Documentary Award*; and Maryland International Film Festival.

In addition to a return to the film festival circuit, *Yemeniettes* was screened three times in three different cities. The City University of New York's (CUNY) Middle Eastern and Middle Eastern American Center

and the Consul General of Lebanon in New York, His Excellency Majdi Ramadan, co-hosted a screening at the CUNY Graduate Center on October 2nd. Later that month, the University of Calgary's Department of Linguistics, Languages, and Cultures screened the film to an enthusiastic audience. Here in Washington, DC, Layalina partnered with the Royal Embassy of the Netherlands and Yemeniaty to co-host a screening at the Embassy that was given by her Excellency Joanneke Balfoort, the Deputy Chief of Mission. Kim Ghattas, the BBC correspondent who is covering Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign, moderated the post-screening conversation.

Yemeniettes also received recognition as one of the top 250 documentaries of 2015 by the Spotlight Documentary Film Awards, and was honored with their Silver Award. This brings the total number of awards won by *Yemeniettes* to eleven, making it the most celebrated film in Layalina's 15-year history.

Yemeniettes is directed by Shawn Thompson and created, written and produced by Leon Shahabian, Layalina's President and Co-founder.



“When the audience left the theatre last night, talking about the film... I smiled. I knew that our festival goers had made the right decision in choosing *Yemeniettes* as their choice for best documentary.”

- Nora Brown, Executive Director, High Falls Film Festival

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CONTACT LAYALINA | 1666 CONNECTICUT AVE, NW | SUITE 240 | WASHINGTON, DC 20009 | TEL 202.776.7761 | WWW.LAYALINA.TV