

INTERVIEW AP:

Cannes sensation puts child poverty in the spotlight

By Jake Coyle - May 18 2018

“It’s been a life-changing adventure,” said Labaki, whose husband Khaled Mouzanar produced the film and composed the score. “It’s about love. It’s about being loved.”



INTERVIEW HOLLYWOOD REPORTER: Cannes: Nadine Labaki on ‘Capernaum’ and Resisting the Lure of Hollywood

By Alex Ritman – May 9, 2018

“I was trying to understand how the system fails these kids,” says Labaki, giving direction on the set of ‘*Capernaum*’ with Alrafeea.

Speaking with *THR*, Labaki describes casting the very kids her story revolves around and why she didn’t give herself a main role in the film.

After her Directors’ Fortnight bowing debut *Caramel* (2007) and her follow-up, *Where Do We Go Now?*, which premiered in Un Certain Regard in 2011, Lebanese actress turned director Nadine Labaki completes the Cannes set with her third feature, *Capernaum*, heading into the Official Competition. Set in a fictitious Middle Eastern village (much like *Where Do We Go Now?*), *Capernaum* takes Labaki’s unique cinematic microscope to the region’s countless neglected children “excluded from society” — the youths who fall through the cracks in the system and are left to fend for themselves. At its heart is a 12-year-old (Zain Alrafeea) who decides enough is enough and sues his parents for bringing him into a world of suffering. Speaking with *THR*, Labaki describes casting the very kids her story revolves around, why she didn’t give herself a main role and how she has resisted the lure of Hollywood.

Capernaum was first announced two years ago. Has it been a difficult process getting it made?

Yes! We shot for more than six months, have more than 500 hours of rushes and have been editing for the past year and a half.

Why has it taken so long?

I needed to have time with these kids, because none of them is a professional actor. I needed the time for them to really understand what they’re doing, know why they’re doing what they’re doing and to be able to capture their reality. And before the shoot, I did more than three years of research. I was trying to understand how the system fails these kids. It was important for me to base this on real stories, real events and real experiences.

Was there a particular case that sparked the story?

There were many, many, many cases. These kids are facing extreme neglect. I see them all around every day, and everybody just feels completely powerless. And that’s maybe why we turn away. I wanted to be in the head of these kids and understand what happens when you turn away and the kid goes around the corner and disappears from your vision. Who are their parents? What are they thinking?

And what did you discover?

From the interviews I had with the kids, almost 99 percent of them said they didn’t want to be here. I asked them, “Are you happy to have been born?” And they said, “You know, I’m not happy, I didn’t ask for this, I didn’t ask to be here.” Going from one kid to another, slowly this came to life. I realized the film was going to be about a kid who was going to say, “Why did you give me life if you can’t take care of me, if you’re not going to give me love? Why did you bring me into this world?”

Do you cast children in the same situation as those in your story?

Yes, the kids in the film are almost in the same situation. The 12-year-old lead, Zain, is at least lucky to have loving parents. He’s a Syrian refugee who’s been living here [Beirut] for five or six years, but when we started, he wasn’t going to school and faced a lot of hardships. He’s only now just learned to read and write his name. But there are thousands of kids in Zain’s situation.

This is the first film of yours that you don’t star in. Why?

I actually wrote a role for myself, but it’s a very, very small role. I’m almost like an extra. I just felt I was going to be a fake standing next to all these people who are real and who are talking about their own life experiences. In comparison to their stories, I don’t stand a chance.

As one of the most prominent Arab filmmakers working today, have you resisted the calls from Hollywood?

Not intentionally. It’s always very tempting, and I’ve read a lot of scripts. But for me, filmmaking is a way of expressing myself. Until now, I’ve not really found a script that really expresses my own obsessions and what I want to talk about. I’ve been tempted, but I always want to write my own script. But I’m not completely opposed to it!