

Interview: 'Nice Bombs' Director Usama Alshaibi, Nat Dykeman of Cinema Obscura DVD

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CHICAGO – October 27th is the release date for “Nice Bombs,” a personal documentary from Cinema Obscura DVD about the homecoming of a native Iraqi to his old hometown of Baghdad, still in the midst of the Iraq War.

The film follows director Usama Alshaibi, as he contemplates and completes his two-and-a-half week visit to Baghdad, meeting long lost relatives after 24 years of exile. Alshaibi's profile describes it as “Both an inwards exploration of personal identity and an outward examination of a post-Hussein Iraq through interviews with family and friends.”



Director Usama Alshaibi (upper left) among his countrymen in Baghdad, in 'Nice Bombs.'
Photo credit: NiceBombs.com

Nat Dykeman, who runs Cinema Obscura DVD, and the documentary creator/director Usama Alshaibi talked to HollywoodChicago in anticipation of the October 27th DVD release and the journey to get this unique story available for the marketplace.

HollywoodChicago.com: What is the background of Cinema Obscura's involvement in the 'Nice Bombs' DVD release?

Nat Dykeman: I knew someone in the BenzFilm Group, who produced it. I went to the premiere and loved the movie, it had won Best Documentary at the Chicago Underground Film Festival. It also had a theatrical release and was shown on the Sundance Channel.

When the DVD release came up, they came back to Cinema Obscura because simply they wanted a nice product and saw that we could deliver. They wanted somebody, even though we were smaller, that would meet the expectations of the DVD release and nurture the film product.

HC: Cinema Obscura DVD is a relatively new sales and distribution company. What is your philosophy regarding the type of films you want to offer the marketplace?

ND: As the logo and name suggests, we release smaller and more obscure titles. ‘Nice Bombs’ is our biggest release.

Typically we deal with projects in the low-to-no-budget range, that have done well in the festival circuit and people have seen them. There is no ‘KFC secret recipe’ (laughs), it’s about finding good product, getting them out on DVD and then getting them into distribution channels.

With my background in DVD sales at the retail level and running the Lake County Film Festival I see a lot of independent films that I want to put out.

HC: Usama, what type of global understanding are you trying to communicate in this documentary?

Usama Alshaibi: On a basic level, the opportunity to see an Iraqi family through my perspective. As someone who had to leave Iraq at an early age, and being displaced from the country of my origin, this is a story about having loved ones and relatives back in Baghdad. It a typical situation in this scenario.

Since the war started in 2003, there are many countries and people who are involved directly. In the U.S., there are people who are for it, against it, who have family members in the military that are over there. And then there is the Iraqi people, which is a perspective that we don’t have that often.

‘Nice Bombs’ doesn’t emphasize the war, it is rather my connection to Iraq and the Iraqi people, universally what those people recognize and share it with the rest of the world. It is an opportunity to showcase Iraq and its people.

HC: With the war still ongoing, what do Americans need to know about the Iraqi people and how does this film help?

UA: Though the problems are far from over, it is because Iraq has a fairly large middle class there has been some amazing improvements. The country is more or less on its own feet. There is still U.S. presence but it is pretty much hands off, they can’t do anything unless the Iraqi government asks them.

I think the American people need to be patient with Iraq and the U.S. involvement. There is no military solution anymore, but definitely there needs to be more aid, plus an awareness and a sense of responsibility. There has to be more than invading a country, being gung-ho and then just getting bored and have no more interest. We’re all indirectly connected to this.

HC: ‘Nice Bombs’ refers to an off-hand remark that one of your cousins makes about the constant explosions in Baghdad. What do you want to say in the film about living in such a war zone?

UA: In an off-hand way, it’s really about the humor. People have this impression that everyone is huddled together waiting for the bombing to be over. It’s more complicated than that. When the initial bombing period was over, there was still daily random violence – everything from insurgent attacks to kidnappings.

War is a common theme over there and speaks about the culture. And humor is used to protect themselves, a type of sense of humor that I’ve never seen before. Laughing in the face of death.

It comments on Iraqis but it’s also a sad reality that I hope will change.

HC: Finally, what was the highlight about visiting your homeland again and what did you most take away from the experience.

UA: It was important for me to go back to Iraq, because I’ve been in the United States so long that more or less this is my home now. Going back and visiting Iraq it would seem difficult to me to permanently moved back.

It just felt good to connect again and to go back to the place where I was born. As a human being, there is a need to connect to your origin. In the face of all that, there was the war, the dangerous journey and the tumultuous homecoming that also all made it very dramatic.

Besides just the movie it was probably the most important journeys I’ve ever made. And as a film it one of my most important pieces. It did make me feel vulnerable, and like a true documentary I went ‘into the cave’ and went into the unknown to both show to myself and the world the real Iraq.

“Nice Bombs” releases on DVD by Cinema Obscura October 27th and can be obtained on [Amazon.com](#) [13]. Find more information on the film [here](#). [14]

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