

# BACKCHAT

WITH NAYLA AL KHAJA



Abu Dhabi has a fast-growing movie scene, but the capital needs something beyond film festivals and big-screen blockbusters, says **Nayla Al Khaja**. So, she's planning to launch an independent film club...

There are a lot of film clubs in the world. I was part of one in Canada when I lived there, but it's something that's missing here. I can't understand why it's never been tried before in Abu Dhabi.

Film fever is catching all around the region, especially in Gulf countries. It's fantastic that we have film festivals, but they only happen once a year, and once they're over, they're over. We need something more constant and consistent on a monthly basis for people with like-minded interests to come together, almost like a festival but spread out over 12 months of the year.

My film club will celebrate independent Arab

cinema, because there's nowhere dedicated to it. However, it will show films that speak to a broader range of audiences, regardless of language. The films don't necessarily have to be by an Arabic film-maker – it could be a German director who shot something in Abu Dhabi – but it has to have something about the region, an aesthetic value or storyline. That's the only clause. The idea is to make people excited to watch independent cinema as opposed to commercial movies.

The venue won't change every month. This way people become familiar with a location, and it starts to be part of their routine. The only thing that will change is the film-makers and the films. I'm looking for a venue that will be very cosy, that can accommodate 300-plus people, with the right facilities, projectors and soundsystem, so people can really enjoy the experience and mingle afterwards in a networking room. I really want to bring locals and expats together. That's important. I think a lot of misconceptions will be broken down at the club; it's a fantastic opportunity for nationals and expats to talk beyond work and ask questions they might normally be worried to ask.

A film club will never make money, so the idea is just to create a platform to really enjoy film-making. What's my motivation? I love film. It's something you enjoy and you want to share with people who have the same thoughts. I wouldn't be surprised if people who meet at the club actually end up making films together. That's another motivation to start the club.

I have a list of 20 films and I'm going to filter them and see which directors are interested in coming, because we have to fly them in. There will be screenings with debates with the director afterwards. You have to find a balance and keep in mind cultural taboos and boundaries, because a lot of independent films do have scenes that aren't suitable. But I would never ever edit an independent film. I would rather not screen it. It would be so insulting. It's like dribbling paint on somebody's canvas. It's made from the heart and should be respected. I'm going to make sure the club is done right, because I'm so passionate about it.

**Nayla Al Khaja is the CEO of D-Seven Motion Pictures. She begins filming her first feature-length movie next year**

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