

DESERT ROSE FILMS  
PRESENTS

NASER AL MESSABBI

REEM AL MESSABI

AHMAD AL JASMI

BELAL ABDULLAH

AHMAD ABDULRAZZAK

MAJAD ALJASMI

# Mountain Boy

فتى الجبل

BASED ON A CHILDREN'S BOOK SERIES BY  
MICHELE ZIOLKOWSKI

PRODUCED BY  
NANCY PATON AND MEREDITH BRETT

SCREENPLAY BY  
NANCY PATON AND RAIHANA ALHAISHMI

DIRECTED BY  
ZAINAB SHAHEEN

PRODUCTION DESIGNER  
PRANALI DIWADKAR

CINEMATOGRAPHER  
DENSON BAKER

EDITOR  
FAKHER AL DEEN AL AMRI

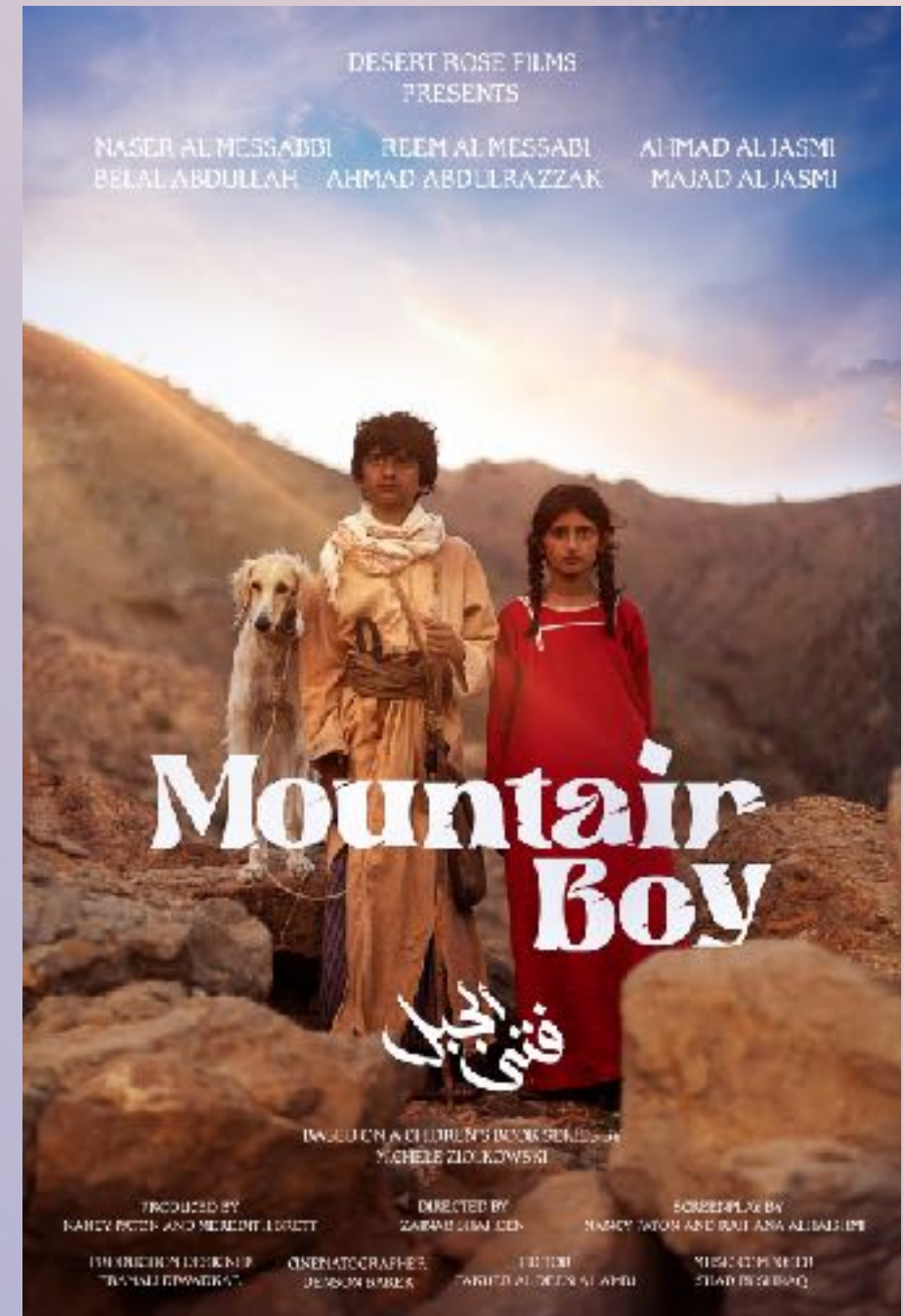
MUSIC COMPOSER  
SUAD BUSHNAQ

# Mountain Boy

## Adventure Family Feature Film

### Diversity in action

- the feature film debut of Emirati director Zainab Shaheen
- a female-led team of emerging Emirati and Gulf filmmakers and actors
- a story about autism, made by families living with autism, starring an actor with autism
- unknown landscapes: showcasing the natural environment of Fujairah
- new glimpses of our heritage: life before oil and nationhood in 1959 Fujairah
- sole Middle East nominee in Diversity & Inclusion category, 2023 Global Production Awards





Mountain Boy is a live-action feel good family adventure feature film based on the award-winning UAE children's book *The Boy Who Knew the Mountains* by Michele Ziolkowski.

Suhail is a young Emirati Boy with Autism shunned by his family and villagers who do not understand his disability. Suhail retreats to the Mountains of Fujairah where he lives alone. Inspired to find his destiny, Suhail ventures out with his new friend Barakah, the Arabian Saluki to find acceptance, family and redemption.



The film is a passionate exploration of the world of neurodiverse people to honor the entire human experience and understand there are many ways to be alive.

# Neurodiversity on screen

## A chance for families living with autism to see themselves

- The UAE is recognized world-wide for championing People of Determination (the nation's terminology for those living with disability or special needs in a world where they are not always accommodated).
- Not only is the book loosely based on a real Emirati boy with autism, but Desert Rose Films was adamant about finding an Emirati boy with autism to play the role of Suhail.
- Suhail is unique, but everyone who encounters autism in their lives will recognize some of the qualities and challenges of his story.
- Mountain Boy will join the growing body of work celebrating diversity by highlighting the special qualities that people with autism use to relate to their worlds.



12 year old actor Naser Almessabi stars as Suhail. As a child living with autism, Naser was able to apply his love of memorisation to the challenges of script learning. Swimming and karate practice have also helped him build the physical and mental capabilities that have been part of creating this role.

# Women in Film

## Building the skills of Emirati and Gulf women filmmakers

- From the start we made sure women would be the heads of departments to be as inclusive as possible.
- This mostly female production team mentored Emirati and Gulf Women Filmmakers to build the national skilled crew base.
- Desert Rose Films is committed to creating original, independent, female character-driven films that capture compelling stories. We are giving women in the region a voice both in front of and behind the camera – creating a movement of organic, dynamic and compelling storytelling from a new perspective.
- Founder and creative director of Desert Rose Films Nancy Paton is the first president of Women in Film & TV - GCC, and founder of the Female Short Film Fund for the Middle East and North Africa Region





**Zainab Shaheen**  
Director

Mountain Boy is the feature film directorial debut of Emirati director Zainab Shaheen. Born in Fujairah, she is committed to empowering Emirati and UAE-based talent to tell uniquely Emirati stories.

Zainab's previous short films include *Journey of Hope*, *Dates to Mars*, *Fujairah Vlog*, and *UAE 2071*.

Zainab has also worked with The British Council on an international collaboration with Manchester Metropolitan University, spotlighting her game development, social media, and digital filmmaking experience.



**Michele Ziolkowski**  
Author

Michele is the award-winning author of children's books *The Boy Who Knew the Mountains*, *Suhail's Abu Dhabi Adventure*, and *Little Camel*. Originally a Polish, Australian, Michele is now a naturalised UAE citizen living in Fujairah with her Emirati husband and son, Suhail. She has received grants and awards for her work including the Sheikh Mubarak bin Mohammed al-Nahyan award (Emirates Natural History Group) in 2006 and a Sharjah Book Award for the best children's book (English) in 2017.

With a doctorate in archaeology, Michele has authored and edited numerous academic publications on the archaeology, history and heritage of the Emirates.



**Denson Baker**  
Cinematographer

Denson Baker ACS, NZCS is an award winning cinematographer of international feature films, music videos, documentaries and commercials. His recent credits include feature film *The Colour Room*, *Ophelia*, *Measure Of A Man*, *The Black Balloon*, *The Waiting City* and *The Luminaries* series.

Denson was the set-up DP on the SkyTV series *Domina* and has shot episodes on the ITV series *Victoria* and the police detective crime drama *Grace*. He was the DP of the reshoots on the Academy Award winning *Get Out* which included the tone setting opening scene.

Originally from New Zealand, Denson is an Australian Film Television and Radio School alumnus. In 2005 he was accredited by the Australian Cinematographers Society. His films have been shown in major international film festivals including Sundance, Cannes, Toronto, Venice, Tribeca, Clermont-Ferrand, Berlin, and LA.



**Nancy Paton**  
Producer  
Screenwriter

Nancy is an award-winning Polish, Australian film director, screenwriter and producer, based in Abu Dhabi. Nancy's passion is to tell distinctive stories of this region and to help local women build their careers in film. She is the founder and Creative Director at Desert Rose Films and the Female Short Film Fund for MENA which recently produced the award-winning UAE short comedy *The Dinner*, selected for multiple film festivals in 2020.

When moving to the middle east ten year ago she wrote and directed the award-winning film *Daisy* and its companion documentary *Maisy and the Making of Daisy* which were shown on Showtime and still run on Amazon Prime. She wrote, produced, directed and starred in the award-winning drama *Postpartum*, filmed in Saudi Arabia with an amateur, all-female cast and then continued with the team to produce the documentaries *The Black Abaya* and *Nowell's Mission* while lecturing Digital Photography, Screenwriting and Storyboarding at Raffles Design Institute in Riyadh. Nancy is the President of Women In Film and TV GCC.



**Raihana AlHashmi**  
Screenwriter

Raihana is an Emirati filmmaker, marketer and screenwriter. She started her arts & filmmaking career in 2014. She was featured in galleries in Riyadh, Jeddah & Abu Dhabi and has been part of short films with several international screenings and awards. She is also a voice over artist, most recently cast as the voice of the nation in the UAE's Year of the 50th campaign.

Raihana started her career as a special audience marketer in the tech industry where she advanced in audience marketing and partnerships. She currently manages events and outreach at the UAE Space Agency.

Recently she co-founded MISHKA, a storytelling home to represent the regional identity in Emirati TV shows, films, and commercials.



**Meredith Brett**  
Producer

Meredith has extensive experience in film development and finance, media tech and digital distribution. She has a number of films in development, including *Star of the Morning* (with Oscar-winning producer Gareth Unwin), the true story of Lady Hester Stanhope who went in search of Arabia in 1815.

Meredith is from Canada and is a partner of Flying Tiger Entertainment, a production/finance company in London. She has worked on the finance for titles including *The Dresser* and BBC's *Wolf Hall*.

Meredith has also advises governments on the creation and management of tax incentive programmes to build local film industries. Meredith co-founded The Studio Group, which is developing a portfolio of film studios across the world.



## **Pranali Diwadkar** Production Designer

Pranali is an international production designer, illustrator, painter, photographer and interior designer. She has been an integral part of Hollywood films including *Mission Impossible*, *Star Wars — the Force Awakens*, *Star Trek - Beyond*, *Syriana*, *Fast and Furious* and *Misfits*. Pranali was also the HOD of the art department of *Desert Warrior*, the first feature film shot in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, starring Sir Ben Kingsley and Anthony Mackie.

Pranali is a graduate of Sir JJ School of Arts and London Film Academy based in Dubai.



## **Fakhreddine Amri** Editor

Fakhreddine is a Chief Editor of Tunisian origin with over 15 years of post-production experience.

Some of his most notable projects include *De La Guerre*, by Fadhel Jazari, *Babylon*, by Alaeddine Slim, and most recently, "Night Courier" by Ali Kalthami.

Whether it's a feature film, TV show, or commercial, Fakhreddine's passion for storytelling and creative vision shines through in every project he undertakes.



## **Suad Bushnaq** Composer

Suad is an award-winning composer with more than forty film credits to date. Her awards include a Hollywood Music in Media Award for her piece "Tomorrow" and a Best Original Score at the LA Fine Arts Film Festival for the feature film *Jasmine Road*.

Her latest work includes *Hanging Gardens* which had its world premier at the 79th Biennale di Venezia. She was selected for the Festival de Cannes' Spot the Composer Program 2021 and the SESAC's Film Story Residence in LA. Her work has been screened at festivals including La Biennale di Venezia, Locarno, Hot Docs and Edinburgh.



## **Firdaus Orchestra** Soundtrack

The 50-strong Firdaus Orchestra is an all-female orchestral ensemble comprising musicians from across the Arab world.

It was formed initially to perform at the Dubai Expo 2020, with musicians to be mentored and conducted by AR Rahman, composer for Indian and international films, whose music for *Slumdog Millionaire* earned him Best Original Score and Best Original Song at the 81st Academy Awards.



# Emirati people and culture

## Onscreen and behind the camera

- *Mountain Boy* is bringing together Emirati and Emirates-based talents to tell a uniquely Emirati story.
- *Mountain Boy* presents the unseen beauty and history of the UAE to international audiences
- Author Dr. Michele Ziolkowski is a naturalized Emirati citizen based in Fujairah who has been researching the archaeology, history and heritage of the Emirates for many years.
- We seek to strengthen and promote Emirati culture by telling their stories, **showcasing Emirati People**, culture and landscape internationally, and ensuring that gulf people see themselves onscreen.
- A unique and vivid feature of the film are the authentic Arabic dialects indigenous to each specific region used by the various characters. It is rare to be able to capture these diverse Arabic dialects that span multiple areas of UAE. The nuanced metaphorical references and the linguistic details also directly relate to not only the sociology but also the historical context of the country.

# Gulf news

# The National News


PRESS INTEREST

**FRIDAY**  
Beauty | Welcoming | Arts & People | Home | Friday Partner

## Abu Dhabi mom's book on her son becomes movie to raise awareness about autism

Upcoming movie Mountain Boy will raise awareness

Published: March 17, 2023 9:00  
Fahima Khushf



**On the set of Mountain Boy**

A little away, I see an abaya-clad young woman inspecting the lighting and set before getting "action". She is Zahra Sobeih, an Emirati who is directing the film.

As the crew reset their roles, a small group of students began performing and the dramatic the mountains is coloring, almost hypnotic.

"The filmmaking process is new to me. I'm a bit nervous and thrilled at the same time," admits Michele, the author of the book. "The book series is important to us as a family. While it is a work of fiction, the characters are based on our son and our experiences as a family. We hope that the story translates into an accessible film that also highlights a powerful message of inclusion."

Michele Zolovskii and her son Sahal in their home in Abu Dhabi. Michele's book on her son is being made into a film.

<https://gulfnews.com/friday/art-people/dubai-moms-book-on-her-son-becomes-movie-to-raise-awareness-about-autism-1.94366546>

**ARTS & CULTURE**

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## Emirati film Mountain Boy tells story of an autistic boy in Fujairah

The film is based on 2017 children's book The Boy Who Knows the Mountains by Emirati-Austrian author Michele Zolovskii



The film's producers, however, were worried whether they would be able to find someone to play the leading role for him. It also raised some of the same issues. The UAE had very dedicated facilities for children with autism.

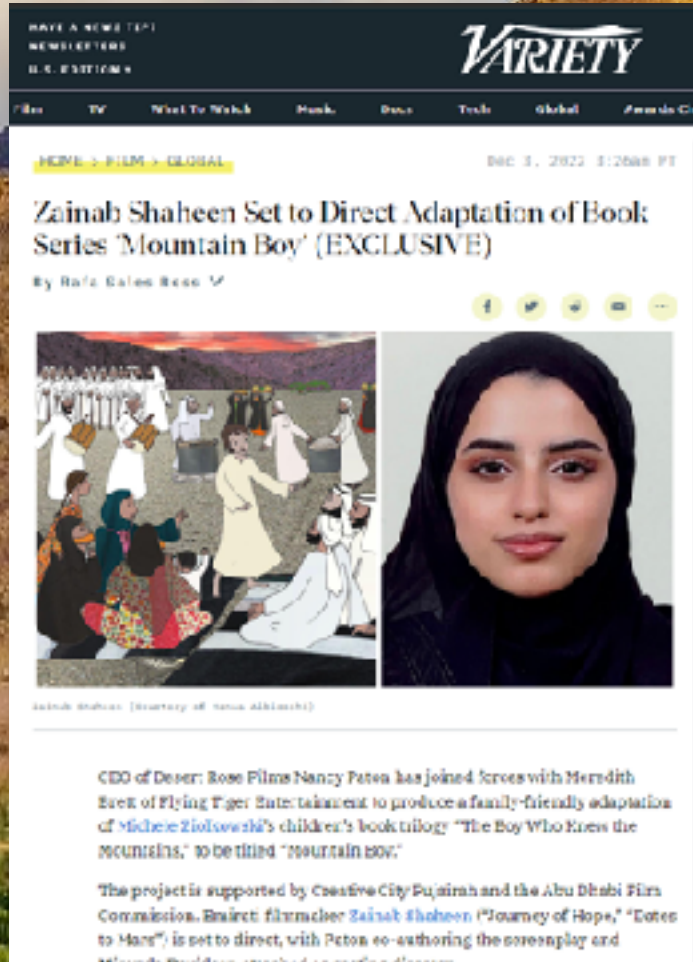
"We auditioned 20 boys with autism," she says. "It's so hard and lonely, and we were afraid that they would offend the other actors (Zahra) and that we would be seen as a bad actor. My team and I had started to panic that we weren't going to find the right person because he has to be calm and speak in a normal sound."

Though there were challenges, Khatib says it was all in the end.

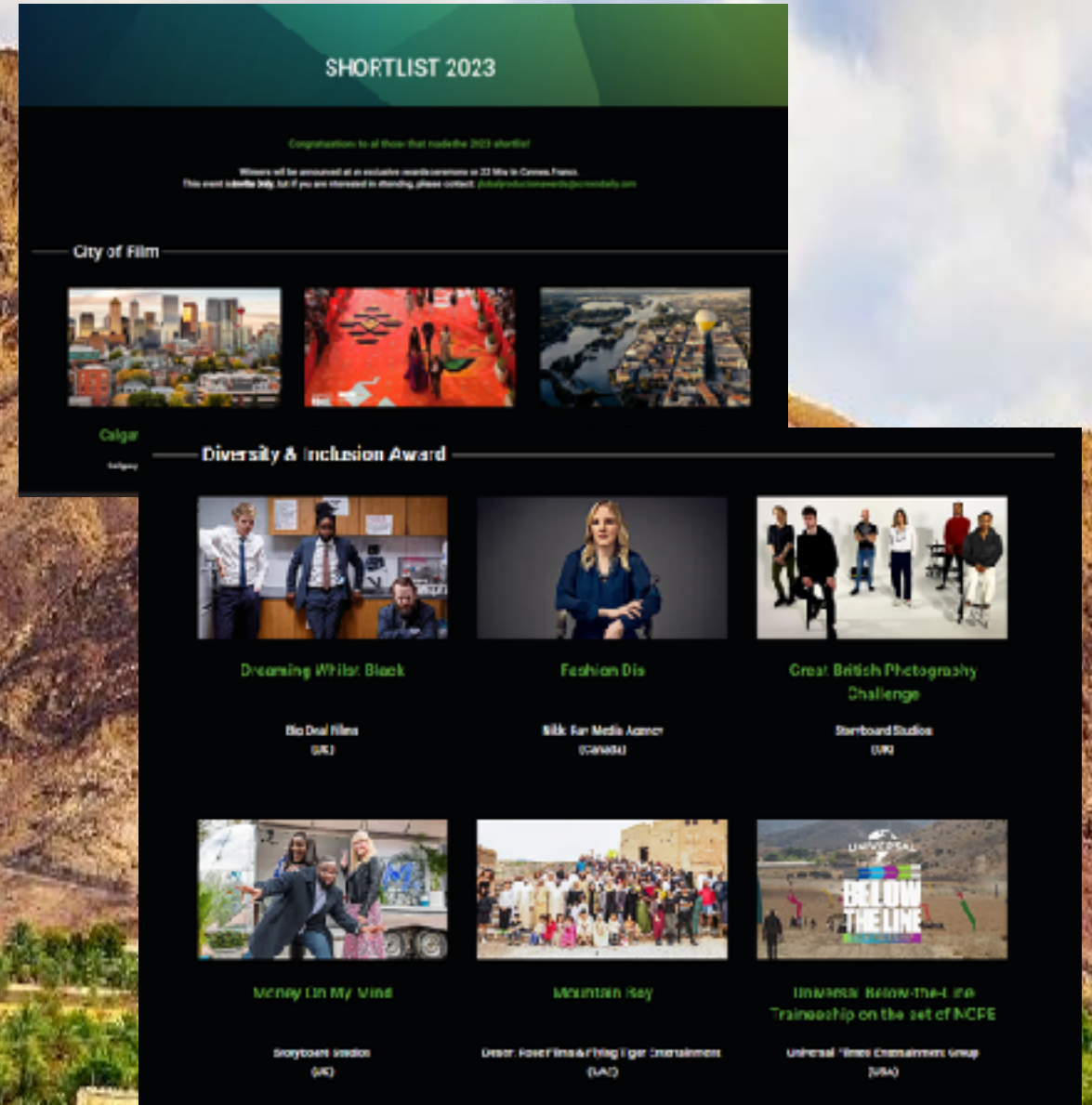
"There were amazing scenes that I didn't think I'd be doing," she says. "The team here is really with him and he can be able to act. He's been so happy and very, very, very happy. It gives me a lot of hope that the film would allow the audience to understand the world through different eyes."

<https://www.thenationalnews.com/arts-culture/film-tv/2023/02/28/emirati-film-mountain-boy-tells-story-of-an-autistic-boy-in-fujairah/>

# Variety



[https://variety.com/2022/film/global/zainab-shaheen-mountain-boy-1235448836/?cx\\_testId=48&cx\\_testVariant=cx\\_1&cx\\_artPos=0#cxrecs\\_s](https://variety.com/2022/film/global/zainab-shaheen-mountain-boy-1235448836/?cx_testId=48&cx_testVariant=cx_1&cx_artPos=0#cxrecs_s)



<https://www.globalproductionawards.com/shortlist-2023>

PRESS INTEREST

DIVERSITY INCLUSION NOMINATIONS 2023



**Desert Rose** Films

Creating positive change  
one story at a time

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