



STARS OF DISNEY'S LIVE-ACTION 'ALADDIN' RETURN TO JORDAN AS PART OF FILM'S ONGOING MAGIC CARPET WORLD TOUR

'Aladdin opens in Middle East theaters today'

The stars of Disney's live-action adaptation "Aladdin," including Will Smith, Mena Massoud, Naomi Scott and director Guy Ritchie, returned to Jordan—where portions of the film were shot— as part of the ongoing Magic Carpet World Tour. The group attended a VIP screening of the film under Royal Patronage and hosted by Prince Ali Bin Al Hussein at Abdali Mall Prime Cinema and participated in a press conference organized by and located at the Royal Film Commission - Jordan. "Aladdin" opens in US theaters May 24, 2019 and in Jordan May 23, 2019.

On the heels of Paris, London and Berlin, Jordan is the fourth stop on the film's Magic Carpet World Tour and the continuation of a partnership that began several years ago. The "Aladdin" production was in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan for several weeks in November 2017 to capture the natural beauty of the stunning desert vistas for the big screen. The production resulted in the hiring of 150 locals to supplement the existing UK crew. The RFC provided invaluable support during filming, including comprehensive production services and assistance in facilitating logistics with local authorities.

"Jordan did not only provide the amazing landscape needed for such a beautiful story, but also all the support needed to make it a success," says Princess Rym Ali, managing director by interim of the Royal Film Commission - Jordan. "The Royal Film Commission is committed to helping good stories materialize on screen. And this goes beyond offering production services. Local professional crew are available. We care about training as well as building an audience appreciative of quality movies." Producers

Dan Lin and Jonathan Eirich, director Guy Ritchie and executive producer Kevin de la Noy looked at a number of different countries in the Middle East and North Africa before deciding on Jordan.

It was the region's aesthetic beauty and the benefits afforded the production through the RFC that helped cement their decision. Over the past 10 years, the film industry has created close to 95,000 job placement opportunities in Jordan. Recent productions to have shot in the country include "The Martian," "Dune" and "Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker." The RFC is focused on training and capacity building to enhance local available talent for production support and has an incentives package to help entice other productions to come film in Jordan. They are currently in the process of designing a soundstage for post-production work.

About 'Aladdin':

A thrilling and vibrant live-action adaptation of Disney's animated classic, "Aladdin" is the exciting tale of the charming street rat Aladdin, the courageous and self-determined Princess Jasmine and the Genie who may be the key to their future. Directed by Guy Ritchie ("Sherlock Holmes," "The Man from U.N.C.L.E."), who brings his singular flair for fast-paced, visceral action to the fictitious port city of Agrabah, "Aladdin" is written by John August ("Dark Shadows," "Big Fish") and Ritchie based on Disney's "Aladdin." The film stars Will Smith ("Ali," "Men in Black") as the larger-than-life Genie, Mena Massoud ("Tom Clancy's Jack Ryan") as the charming scoundrel



Aladdin: Naomi Scott ("Power Rangers") as Jasmine, the beautiful, self-determined princess; Marwan Kenzari ("Murder on the Orient Express") as Jafar, the powerful sorcerer, Navid Negahban ("Legion") as the Sultan concerned with his daughter's future, Nasim Pedrad ("Saturday Night Live") as Dalia, Princess Jasmine's free-spirited best friend and confidante; Billy Magnussen ("Into the Woods") as the handsome and arrogant suitor Prince Anders and Numan Acar ("The Great Wall") as Hakim, Jafar's right-hand man and captain of the palace guards.

"Aladdin" is produced by Dan Lin, p.g.a., ("Sherlock Holmes") and Jonathan Eirich, p.g.a., ("Death Note") with Oscar nominee and Golden Globe winner Marc Platt ("La La Land") and Kevin De La Noy ("The Dark Knight Rises") serving as executive producers. Eight-time Academy Award-winning composer Alan Menken ("Beauty and the Beast," "The Little Mermaid") provides the score, which includes new recordings of the original songs written by Menken and Oscar-winning lyricists Howard

Ashman ("Little Shop of Horrors") and Tim Rice ("The Lion King") and includes two new songs written by Menken and Oscar and Tony Award-winning songwriters Benj Pasek and Justin Paul ("La La Land," "Dear Evan Hansen"). The film, which was shot on practical stages in London and on location amidst the stunning desert vistas of Jordan, has a talented creative team helping to bring Agrabah to life, including: director of photography Alan Stewart ("The Commuter"), production designer Gemma Jackson ("Game of Thrones") and costume designer Michael Wilkinson ("American Hustle").

The 1992 animated film starred Robin Williams and featured such memorable songs as the Oscar-winning "A Whole New World" and "Friend like Me." The film grossed more than \$502 million at the global box office, which led to successful stage productions on Broadway and abroad as well as a North American touring company. "Aladdin" opens in Middle East theaters today.



Handwritten wills purportedly found at Aretha Franklin's home

Three handwritten documents purportedly prepared and signed by Aretha Franklin appear to give instructions on the fate of the late queen of soul's estate, contradicting the belief she had left no will. The documents obtained and published by the Detroit Free-Press newspaper Tuesday were discovered in a spiral notebook under couch cushions in her living room, as well as in a locked cabinet that had previously been inaccessible. The 16 pages of difficult to read, hand-scratched papers dated between 2010 and 2014 appear to distribute assets including real estate, jewelry, furs, stereo equipment and music royalties to her family members.

In the document dated June 21, 2010, the iconic singer declares herself of sound mind and health, except for "high blood pressure" and "a mass on the pancreas." The indomitable Franklin died at age 76 in August 2018 after a long battle with pancreatic cancer, triggering an outpouring of grief. Her death also raised questions over the future of her assets, with her family that includes four sons—with her niece Sabrina Owens appointed as the estate's personal representative—believing she had left no will. Franklin's long-time lawyer David Bennett filed the documents in Michigan's Oakland County probate court, saying he was unsure whether they were valid according to the Midwestern state's law. A hearing is scheduled for June 12.

"The heirs, through their counsel, have been unable to reach a resolution with each other as to the admission, validity, and dispositive provisions" of the apparent wills, the court documents read. Rules in Michigan dictate that if no will is

declared legal, the estate, reportedly valued at some \$80 million, will be divided equally among her four sons.

In April a Michigan probate court judge approved a plan for hired experts to appraise Franklin's estate, which according to local media says it has paid at least \$3 million in back taxes to the Internal Revenue Service since she died. In December the US tax agency filed court documents saying the singer owned more than \$6 million in back taxes and some \$1.5 million in penalties. Franklin's death in Detroit closed the curtain on a glittering six-decade career that spanned gospel, R&B, jazz, blues and even classical music. — AFP



Aretha Franklin

American picked to design vast car-free garden at Eiffel Tower

The city of Paris has chosen an American landscape architect to re-design a huge area surrounding the Eiffel Tower, a project that will banish almost all vehicle traffic near the immensely popular monument. "We can create the biggest garden in Paris... with much more biodiversity, much more ecology," Kathryn Gustafson said after Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo presented the plan late Tuesday. Gustafson has studied in France, where she has designed several parks and squares, but is best well known internationally for her memorial fountain for Britain's Princess Diana in Hyde Park, London.

A total of 54 hectares (133 acres), currently crisscrossed by several roads including two major thoroughfares on each side of the Seine river, will be largely turned over to pedestrians and "low-impact transportation" such as bus and bike lanes. In particular, the heavily used car lanes on the Lena bridge which spans the Right and Left Banks underneath the Eiffel Tower will also be given over to lawns and rows of trees, according to a video rendering of the project.

"We're going to have an extraordinary garden where we'll hear birds singing once again," Hidalgo said. That will be music to the ears of the estimated 150,000 people who visit the site every day during the summer high season, including the 20,000 to 30,000 who climb the tower itself. Overall, seven million people visit the tower each year.

The expansive garden will stretch from the Ecole Militaire, a military academy dating from the 18th century, to the modernist Trocadero esplanade and its Chaillot Palace, built for the 1937 International Expo. The project also calls for an overhaul of the vast lawns on the Champ de Mars, the site of dozens of major public events each year, such as concerts or mass viewings of sporting events like the World Cup. The bulk of the work, expected to cost 72 million euros (\$80 million), is scheduled to be finished before the start of the 2024 Summer Olympic Games in Paris. "The Tower will find itself at the centre of a vast park that will make Parisians want to come and visit," said Jean-Louis Missika, the city's deputy mayor in charge of urbanism. Currently there are "too many cars, too much mass tourism, too many coaches," he said. — AFP



Rodrigo Sanchez (right) and Gabriela Quintero of the Mexican duo Rodrigo y Gabriela pose during a photo session before a concert at the McKittrick Hotel in New York City. — AFP

World famous Mexican guitarists Rodrigo y Gabriela take meditative turn

Headlines have given little love to guitar heroes in recent years, as streaming tastes favor rap and instruments of the greats are celebrated less onstage and more in museums. But more than a decade after soaring to global fame Rodrigo y Gabriela—the Mexican classical guitar duo that draws inspiration as much from prog and thrash metal as flamenco and folk—is still going strong, recently releasing their first studio album in five years, "Meltavolution," to rave reviews and embarking on a global tour.

Disenchanted by the rock scene in their native Mexico, Rodrigo y Gabriela moved to Europe in the late 1990s, settling in Dublin where they began busking and playing local pubs with their fusion of metal with Latin sounds. It wasn't long before the pair—which uses only nylon-stringed acoustic guitars to create their unique, frenetic style heavy on power chords and percussive elements—began winning legions of fans stateside as well as Europe and Latin America.

After the whirlwind success of their eponymous album in 2006 they quickly ascended to a global stage, playing every-

where from top festivals to Barack Obama's White House. Their latest work is a more melodic album than past recordings, a sound they achieved by first writing songs complete with lyrics before stripping away the words in a bid to help their fans meditate exclusively to the guitars.

"When we were kids we didn't know what anxiety was," said Rodrigo Sanchez backstage before the pair played an intimate show at Manhattan's McKittrick Hotel, days after rocking New York's larger Beacon Theatre. "It wasn't until literally a few years ago that we started to understand more... about the effects of meditation, things that could actually help to deal with these emotions," the acoustic rocker with hair dyed electric blue told AFP.

Sanchez said the album evokes the pair's recent "shift in consciousness"—both in their mid-forties, the metalheads are now vegan and have turned their interests to Buddhism and spiritual evolution—that helped them realize "playing music is not something we just do because we like it." "I think it's a service for people," Sanchez said. "It's when we get in touch, really, with our deepest side of ourselves." —AFP