

## Playback July 2008

### Mission impossible

**Warned by no less than Atom Egoyan about shooting in Egypt, Ruba Nadda, right, went ahead with her *Cairo Time* romance anyway, backed up by Danny Iron**

### Nadda, Iron shoot 'impossible' movie

by: Marise Strauss

Writer/director Ruba Nadda instinctively knew Daniel Iron was the right man for the job when she approached him to produce her latest feature *Cairo Time*, a sweeping romantic tale set in the Egyptian capital.

But she wasn't so sure he could keep her out of a Cairo jail.

"You don't trust my legal skills?" Iron asks her, as the duo recently sat down with *Playback* at his Foundry Films office in Toronto, a week after returning from Egypt. *Cairo Time* is Iron's first film since the success of Oscar-nominated *Away from Her*.

"You need someone down and dirty. Our line producer Claire [Welland] is dirtier," Nadda jokes, recalling how close she and her second unit came to being arrested in Cairo for shooting footage of a poor neighborhood, which is taboo in Egypt.

Montreal-born Nadda completed the draft for *Cairo Time* three years ago, around the same time her acclaimed feature *Sabah* was making the festival rounds. She recalls bringing the script to her mentor and *Sabah* exec producer Atom Egoyan.

"He said 'Ruba, what have you done? It's great, but it's impossible to shoot,'" she recalls. Shooting in Egypt can be very difficult, and not just because of the extreme heat and third-world conditions. The country has no coproduction treaty with Canada, and monitors filmmaking closely by assigning a censor to each shoot.

Egoyan suggested Nadda take the script to Iron because "he'd be the only person who could pull it off." The pair hit it off, and the \$4-million film began shooting in Cairo for 25 days in June with key Canuck crew members, including DOP Luc Montpellier and assistant director Daniel Murphy, both of whom worked on *Away from Her*.

*Cairo Time* stars American Patricia Clarkson (*Pieces of April*) as a fortysomething woman who gets stood up by her husband in Cairo, and enters a brief love affair with an Arab man (Alexander Siddig). Mongrel Media is the Canadian distributor.

"It was all about casting, and every time Patricia would do a scene, my heart would drop, because she was just amazing," says Nadda.

Iron is full of praise for the Egyptian crews, who worked quickly and efficiently, though he explains they didn't always know who the crew were.

"Sometimes a lot more people would show up...you'd hire grips, and they would come with equipment and extra people, sometimes up to five or six assistants," Iron says. "But Egypt is the center of production for the Arab world, so they're quite experienced."

The biggest challenge for Iron was financing, since he got less in tax credits due to the film shooting outside Canada. The producer got assistance from Telefilm Canada - on top of his envelope for *Away from Her* - as well as The Harold Greenberg Fund and Mongrel. Though they still weren't fully financed, the crew went ahead with production.

"We had a big chunk, but a big chunk was missing. In order to shoot somewhere like Cairo, you can't just push your date. At a certain point you have to log your date and go...come what may," he says. The film is a coproduction with Ireland, since there is no treaty between Egypt and Canada.

Post-production is currently underway at Technicolor, with delivery set for December. Nadda is pleased with what she's seen in the dailies.

"They're jaw-dropping. I feel like we have gold in our hands," she says.

Iron will map out a festival strategy in the coming months for *Cairo Time*, though he has his eye on Cannes. Charlotte Mickie of Maximum Films is the sales agent.