

بہنا

Wekalet Behna's  
Archives project

January 2024

# Who are we ?

Wekalet Behna is a artistic and culturally inclusive institution focused on film, contemporary arts, education, and research. It challenges cultural norms, encouraging continuous reassessment and evolution. Wekalet Behna engages with local and regional cultural scenes, particularly in Alexandria and its surroundings, where cultural services can be limited.

Wekalet Behna actively contributes to the local artistic and cultural scene through diverse projects, including dialogues, collaborations, publications, and educational programs. Dedicated to fostering critical dialogue and challenging societal beliefs, its ultimate goal is to create a safe space for intellectual development and creative exploration.

# About Behna Films Selection

المدير الفني العام والمخرج : ماريو فولبي  
مأساه عتيقه تدور حوادثها في وادي النيل العزيز  
بين مناظر بديعه ليس لها مثيل اعجاب - ابداع - موسيقى



Metteur en scène et Directeur artistique :  
**MARIO VOLPE**

Sur les bords du Nil se déroule un drame poignant  
dans des paysages incomparables...  
de l'enchantement... du charme... de la musique...

مؤلف وواضع الموسيقى نجيب نحاس  
مؤلف الدباواجات والقصائد خليل بك مطران  
الاغاني تلحين الاستاذ زكريا احمد



L'interprétation de premier  
ordre réunit :

Georges ABIAD — NADRA —  
Abdel Rahman ROUCHDI —  
NADIA — Mohamed ABDALLAH —  
Liane DARVYL — Aly AHMED — Daisy PALMA —  
Zaccaria AHMED — Moursi ABDEL LATIF.

تمثيل : جورج ايض . نادره . عبد الرحمن رشدي . تاديه . محمد عبد الله .  
ليان دارفيل . علي احمد . ديزي بالما .  
زكريا احمد . مرسى عبد اللطيف

التشؤدة الفؤاد

Adaptation et composition musicale du  
Mo. Néguib NAHAS — Dialogues et poèmes  
de Khalil Bey MOUTRAN  
Chansons inédites de Zaccaria AHMED.

Les Chansons du Cœur

Established in the early 1930s, Behna Films Selection emerged as a pioneering force in Egypt's film industry. The company excelled in film production, distribution, and collaborations with key industry figures. Notably, they produced Egypt's first Arabic talking and musical film, 'Onshondat Al-Fuad,' in 1932 and the inaugural Egyptian animated film, 'Mish-Mish Effendi,' in 1936. Becoming the primary distributor for Egyptian films, the company expanded its presence across the Arab world, North Africa, and Europe.

# About Behna Films Selection

After the 1952 revolution and the subsequent Egyptian nationalization campaign, Behna Films Selection faced expropriation and most family properties came under judicial custody in the early 1960's. In 2014, Basile Behna reclaimed the long-abandoned archives and Alexandria headquarters. However, the archives and the agency suffered major preservation issues due to years of neglect, including dust accumulation, humidity, fungus, and pest damage. Extensive renovation work transformed the agency into a functional workspace and storage unit.



# Beginnings of the renovation efforts



# Overview of the fonds

The Wekalah houses a vast archive consisting of around 50 linear meters of documents and 6000 images, predominantly in French and Arabic ; divided in these categories :

- Posters
- Lobby Cards (as shown)
- Photographs
- Dialogues
- Brochures
- Agreements
- Film tickets statements (Bordereaux)
- Export permits (Avis)
- Film copy permits
- Reports (between Cairo and Alexandria's offices)
- Correspondences
- Distribution permits
- Insurances
- Customs
- Films transfers
- Company's Legal Documentation
- Finances





## Overview of the fonds

These archives are much more than a mere collection, representing a historical and cultural legacy. There are 287 Egyptian films, 7 foreign films, records of 119 Egyptian cinemas, and 100 cinemas abroad, providing a comprehensive overview of Egypt's cinema evolution from the 1930s to the present.

Despite limited resources, Wekalet Behna has started restoration efforts, renovating archives, and initiating conservation activities since June 2020, aiming to preserve and protect this invaluable cultural heritage.



Συντεταγμένη και Διευθύντρια  
**Δημ. ΜΠΟΓΓΗ**  
 Μουσική  
**Κ. ΓΙΑΝΝΙΔΗ**  
 Στίχοι  
**Αλεξ. ΣΑΒΒΙΔΗ**  
 'Επιτεταλέμενος  
 εις Αθήνατον και όλον τον κόσμον  
**ΣΕΛΕΙΟΝ ΜΠΕΧΝΑ**  
**Φ Ι Λ Μ**  
**ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΕΙΑ - ΑΙΓΥΠΤΟΣ**  
**Τ. Κ. 1919**  
 Πρώτος Καλλιγράφος  
**Α. Μ. Πουτού Νάσε**  
 Διευθυντής Διασκευών  
**Μαχαιρίτης Νάσε & Κλαυδίου Τσιφλιέτα**  
 Βασιστής  
**Μισέλ Κραουσίνα**  
 Επιμελητής Διασκευών  
**Χ. Σακτούτ**  
 Ηλεκτρολόγος Διασκευών  
**Κώλυο Τσιφλιέτα - Βιτόριου Τσιφλιέτα**  
**Ο. Ραυτογιάν**  
 Φωτογράφος  
**Μηχανήματα συσκευασίας ΣΙΝΕ - ΣΖΑΜΠΟ**  
 Διευθυντής  
**Μ. ΓΚΑΛΓΚΑΜΟΝ - Σ. ΡΕΖΕΚΑ**



# The Digital Library

In the past three years, exploring the archives at Wekalet Behna revealed their immense historical and cultural significance, shedding light on Egypt's cinematic past. Preserving these documents presented considerable challenges, prompting innovative strategies for protection. To address limited resources hindering the full operation of a physical database, Wekalet Behna initiated a digital library project in late 2023. Spearheaded by Basile Behna and a team, this effort aims to digitize the materials, prioritizing visual content like brochures, photographs, and posters. The approach involves meticulous digitization, creating high-quality versions while establishing a database to consolidate diverse materials, ensuring accessibility for future generations.

Overcoming logistical and financial hurdles remains crucial to achieving the goal of an accessible online archive, reflecting the institution's commitment to sharing its rich cinematic history.



# Workflow



# Timeline

2013

Retrieving of the agency and discovery of the fonds + beginning of the renovation works

2017

Visit and first expertise report from La Cinematheque Francaise

2020

First renovation works in one of the rooms dedicated to the archives

2021

Beginning of the archives' treatment

2022

First public exhibition of the archives and beginning of the Digital Library project

2024

Development and reinforcement of new partnerships

# Current and future needs

The project's success relies on securing support from experts and increased resources, aiming to complete this initiative and make the cinematic archive accessible worldwide. Collaborative partnerships with cultural organizations are crucial for preserving this treasure. We are seeking support for a large array of needs :

- Specialists and professional archivists providing expertise
- More team members, in the physical office but also for the data entry positions, ensuring a faster pace of work and a more fluid workflow
- Specific professional training for the team members
- Acid-free archive-grade storage boxes
- Further renovation for the 3 rooms in which the fonds is stored
- A more developed and secured storage system, with 2 NAS in different locations plus a secured cloud storage
- An A3 1200 DPI scanner to be able to digitize the visual material in less steps
- A qualified web-developer





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