

REALITY TV

'So You Want to Be a Muslim?' dives deep into religious exploration

By Caroline Collacutt
TV Media

Intro to Islam: Making its debut during Islamic Heritage Month, the brand-new, feature-length documentary from Canadian filmmaker Hoda Elatawi ("Muneeza in the Middle," 2014), "So You Want to Be a Muslim?," premieres Sunday, Oct. 20, on the Documentary Channel. The film is also available to stream on CBC Gem starting Wednesday, Oct. 23.

A project that spanned nearly a decade, this foray into religion follows five North Americans (three Canadians, alongside one American couple) as they embark on a journey to embrace the Muslim faith, some leaving long-held traditions and religious beliefs in the process. Each in their own way, these individuals face new and exciting experiences but also face the judgment and criticism of those around them.

"For these five — Barbara, Stephanie, Rima, Johnae and Eli — the transition from one religion to another can be simultaneously enlightening and daunting," GAPC Entertainment explains. "Each of the people profiled in the film takes us on a journey that, collectively,

illuminates the striking diversity of the Muslim community.

"Even as they find meaning in their new faith, the varied experiences of these 'new' Muslims speak to the reality of the 'West vs. the rest' mentality. Barbara, Stephanie, Rima, Johnae and Eli reflect on what it's like to live between two worlds, often feeling 'othered' both inside and outside of their communities."

While the five individuals in question share their personal experiences, the film also shares insights from prominent members of the Canadian Muslim community, featuring conversations with Kofi Achampong, the co-founder of the Black Muslim Initiative in Toronto; El-Farouk Khaki, the co-founder of the Unity Mosque in Toronto; and Mohamad Jebara, an Imam, best-selling author and Islamic scholar.

In making "So You Want to Be a Muslim?," Elatawi shared that her goal was to create a greater understanding among those who have little — or very biased — knowledge of the faith. "With words like 'extremist,' 'jihadist' and 'terrorist' plaguing mainstream dialogue when the subject of Islam and Muslims come up in our Western society," Elatawi says, "the deeply

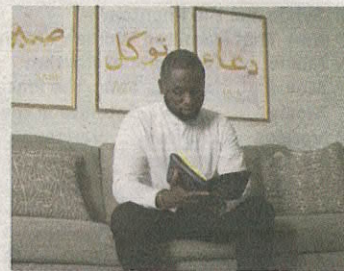
personal stories revealed by the diverse group of people in this film help break stereotypes, challenge our preconceived notions about Islam, and reveal the struggles and truths around what it means to be a Muslim in the West today.

"My takeaway," she concludes, "and I hope it is the viewer's, too, is that, at heart, we are all the same more than we are different."

From executive producer Ken Stewart ("O c'est pour Ottawa"), "So You Want to Be a Muslim?" premieres Sunday, Oct. 20, on the Documentary Channel.

Glory Days: Follow "The Boss" down a long and winding road as the eponymous singer shares his story in "Road Diary: Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band," an all-new documentary premiering Friday, Oct. 25, on Disney+.

Narrated by Bruce Springsteen himself — the singer of classic hits such as "Born to Run," "Dancing in the Dark" and "Hungry Heart" — and directed by Springsteen's long-time collaborator, award-winning filmmaker Thom Zimny ("The Gift: The Journey of Johnny Cash," 2019), this walk down memory lane offers an "evocative look at the



Kofi Achampong as seen in "So You Want to Be a Muslim?"

band's career" (per Disney), which has been playing together since 1972.

"Twenty Grammy Awards, record-setting concerts, albums charting in the Top 5 in each of the last six decades — as a musician, Bruce Springsteen has conquered just about every mountain there is to climb. From that high vantage point, an artist gains a unique perspective," shares a description of the film, given by the Toronto International Film Festival ahead of the film's premiere at TIFF 2024.

The description continues: "That's what Springsteen brings to 'Road Diary': an evocative look back at the path he and his band have blazed since the '70s, and a look forward to what lies on the horizon. Mortality, yes, but also more of the passion, energy and grit

they've always brought to touring, as they prepare to hit the road one more time."

According to Disney, the project offers the "most in-depth look ever at the creation of their legendary live performances — sharing fly-on-the-wall footage of band rehearsals and special moments backstage — as well as hearing directly from Springsteen on the topic." Additionally, fans of the raspy-voiced crooner will be treated to high-definition footage from the current Springsteen & E Street Band 2024 World Tour — shared for the first time ever — as the documentary follows the band through rehearsals and right onto the stage.

Delving into the "singular alchemy that produced such a tight-knit and enduring group" (Disney), "Road Diary: Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band" was produced by Springsteen, Zimny, Jon Landau ("Springsteen on Broadway," 2018), Adrienne Gerard ("Bruce Springsteen's Letter to You," 2020) and Sean Stuart — who produced Springsteen music videos including "Do I Love You (Indeed I Do)" and "Don't Play That Song."

The documentary premieres Friday, Oct. 25, on Disney+.