Omar Sharif

For other people of the same name, see Omar Sharif (disambiguation). This article is about the Egyptian actor. For the Pakistani comedian, see Umer Sharif.

Omar Sharif

Michael Demitri Shalhoub

April 10, 1932 (age 79)
Alexandria, Egypt

Actor
1954–present
Islam
Faten Hamama (1954-74)

Omar Sharif (Arabic: عمر الشريف, Egyptian Arabic pronunciation: [ˈʔomɑɾ ʃeɾɾif], born Michael Demitri Shalhoub, [ˈmɪkəl dəˈmitri ʃalhɑːb]; April 10, 1932) is an Egyptian actor who has starred in Hollywood films including Lawrence of Arabia, Doctor Zhivago and Funny Girl. He has been nominated for an Academy Award and has won two Golden Globe Awards.
Early life

Omar Sharif was born Michel Dimitri Shalhoub in Alexandria into a wealthy Lebanese family. Sharif graduated from Alexandria's Victoria College, where he is reported by his schoolmate Edward W. Said to have been sadistic and physically abusive in his capacity as "head boy" at Alexandria's Victoria College. Sharif later graduated from Cairo University with degrees in both mathematics and physics.

Acting career

In 1953, Sharif began his acting career with a role in *Sira` Fi al-Wadi*. He quickly rose to stardom, appearing in over 20 Egyptian productions including *Ayyamna el helwa* with singer Abdel Halim Hafez, *La anam* in 1958, *Sayedat el kasr* in 1959 and the *Anna Karenina* adaptation *Nahr el hub* in 1961. He also starred with his wife, Egyptian actress Faten Hamama, in several movies as romantic leads.

Sharif's first English language film was in the role of Sherif Ali in *David Lean*’s *Lawrence of Arabia* in 1962. This performance earned him a Best Supporting Actor Oscar nomination, a Golden Globe Award for Best Supporting Actor - Motion Picture. Following this breakthrough role, Sharif played a variety of characters, including a Spanish priest in *Behold a Pale Horse* (1964) and the Mongolian conqueror in *Ghengis Khan*. In 1965, Sharif reunited with Lean to play the title role in *Doctor Zhivago*, an adaptation of Boris Pasternak’s novel. Over the next few years, Sharif starred as a German military officer in *The Night of the Generals*, as Crown Prince Rudolf of Austria in *Mayerling* and as Che Guevara in *Che!*. Sharif was also acclaimed for his portrayal of Nicky Arnstein, husband to Fanny Brice in *Funny Girl*, though some thought he was miscast as a New York Jewish gambler. His decision to work with co-star Barbra Streisand angered Egypt's government at the time due to Streisand's support for the state of Israel. Streisand herself responded with "You think Cairo was upset? You should've seen the letter I got from my Aunt Rose!" Sharif reprised the role in the film's sequel, *Funny Lady* in 1975.

In 2003 he received acclaim for his role in the French-language film adaptation of the novel *Monsieur Ibrahim et les fleurs du Coran* as a Muslim Turkish merchant who becomes a father figure for a Jewish boy.

Contract Bridge career

Sharif once ranked among the world's best known contract bridge players, forming the "Omar Sharif Bridge Circus" in 1967 which toured the world, competing against such powerhouse teams as Blue Team and Dallas Aces, at a time when barnstorming bridge teams were very popular. With Charles Goren, Sharif co-wrote a syndicated newspaper bridge column for the *Chicago Tribune* for several years, but has mostly turned over the writing of the column to Tannah Hirsch, whose name appears on the byline with Sharif to this day. He is also both author and co-author of several books on bridge and has licensed his name to a bridge computer game; initially released in a DOS version and Amiga version in 1992, *Omar Sharif Bridge* is still sold in
Sharif has been a regular in casinos in France. In 2006, Sharif declared both pastimes as ended when he was asked if he still played bridge: “I’ve stopped altogether. I decided I didn’t want to be a slave to any passion any more except for my work. I had too many passions, bridge, horses, gambling. I want to live a different kind of life, be with my family more because I didn’t give them enough time.”

**Personal life**

Sharif is fluent in Arabic, English, Greek, and French. He also speaks some Italian, Spanish and Turkish.

**Family and personal relationships**

Sharif lived in his native Egypt from birth in 1932 until he moved to Europe in 1965. He recounts that, in 1932, his father “wasn’t a wealthy man”, but “earned quite a bit of money.” Before the Egyptian Revolution of 1952, King Farouk frequented Sharif's family's house, and became a friend and card game partner of Sharif's mother. His mother was an elegant and charming hostess who was all too delighted with the association because it gave her the privilege of “consorting only with the elite” of Egyptian society. Sharif also recounts that his father’s timber business was very successful during that time, in ways that Sharif himself describes as dishonest or immoral.

By contrast, after 1952, Sharif states that wealth changed hands (or names) in Egypt, under Nasser's nationalization policies. His father's business "took a beating". Travel restrictions in the form of "exit visas" were required of Egyptians, and his own travel to take part in international films was sometimes impeded, which he could not tolerate. The Nasser government's travel restrictions influenced Omar's decision to remain in Europe between his film shoots, a decision that cost him his marriage to Egyptian film legend Faten Hamama, though they remained friends. It was a major crossroads in Omar's life and changed him from an established family man to a life-long bachelor living in European hotels. When commenting about his fame and life in Hollywood, Sharif said, "It gave me glory, but it gave me loneliness also. And a lot of missing my own land, my own people and my own country." Due to the state of war between Egypt and Israel, Sharif's Egyptian citizenship was almost withdrawn by the Egyptian Government when his affair with Barbra Streisand was made public in the Egyptian press due to Streisand's vocal support of Israel.

In 1955, Omar El-Sharif converted to Islam and then married Egyptian actress Faten Hamama. The couple had one son, Tarek El-Sharif, who appeared in Doctor Zhivago as Yuri at the age of eight. They separated in 1966 and the marriage ended in 1974. Sharif never remarried; he stated that since his divorce, he never fell in love with another woman, and that, although he lived abroad for years, it was not possible for him to fall in love with a woman who was not Egyptian.

Sharif with Lebanese actress/singer Cyrine Abdelnour at the Venice film festival (2009)

Sharif became friends with Peter O'Toole during the making of Lawrence of Arabia. They have appeared in several other films together and remain close friends. He is also good friends with Egyptologist Zahi Hawass. Actor and friend Tom Courtenay revealed in an interview for the July 19, 2008, edition of BBC Radio's Test Match Special that Sharif supported Hull City Association Football Club and in the 1970s would telephone their automated scoreline from his home in Paris for score updates. Sharif was given an honorary degree by the University Of Hull in 2010 and used the occasion to meet up with Hull City football player Ken Wagstaff.

At present, Sharif resides mostly in Cairo with his family. In addition to his son, he has two grandsons, Omar (b. 1983 Montreal) and Karim. Omar's elder grandson, Omar Sharif Jr. is also an actor. He is most recently known for playfully tussling on stage at the 83rd Academy Awards ceremony with actor Kirk Douglas, who was presenting the award for Best Supporting Actress that evening.

**Health problems**

Sharif underwent a triple bypass surgery in 1992, and suffered a mild heart attack in 1994. Sharif had smoked 50 cigarettes a day; after the surgery, he quit easily. Sharif then met his now close friend and lawyer Nabil Mounir. When Sharif visits Egypt, he stays in Nabil Mounir's residence in Cairo. Sharif met Mounir at the same hospital where he had his surgery; Mounir was there because his wife was in labor. They met through a mutual friend, Naquib Mahfouz, who would divide his time between both men's hospital rooms. From that day on, Sharif and Mounir became very close friends. They both attended their mutual friend's funeral in 2006 at the El-Rashdan Mosque in Nasr City.

**Criminal conviction**

On August 5, 2003, he received a one-month suspended prison sentence for striking a police officer in a suburban Parisian casino in July. He was fined...
the equivalent of $1,700 (USD) and ordered to pay the officer the equivalent of $340 in damages. (He had insulted and then head-butted the Pontoise policeman, who tried to intervene in an argument between the actor and a roulette croupier.) On February 13, 2007 Sharif was “found guilty of assaulting a Beverly Hills parking lot attendant and breaking his nose”.

Doha Tribeca Film Festival
On November 27, Omar Sharif became irritated with a woman who was queued up to have her photo taken with him on the red carpet at Doha Tribeca Film Festival. It appeared that he struck her, but after a moment he turned and leaned in to smile warmly for a picture with her.

Political views
Sharif said the East will never have a democracy because people like him prefer to go to the neighborhood chief. In the interview, Sharif reportedly blasted U.S. policy in Iraq and said Americans are ignorant. Sharif also claimed to have spoken with U.S President George W. Bush before the beginning of the Iraq War, telling him that Arabs were not like westerners and that Arab states were made up of sects resistant to becoming democratized.

Views on religion
In an interview conducted with The Daily News Egypt, Omar Sharif mentioned his views on religion, and religious people:

When one sees what happens in the world between the religions, the different religions - killing each other and murdering each other, it's disgusting and as far as I am concerned it's ridiculous. So I thought I might be useful, I believe in God and I believe in religion, but believe religions should belong to you. The extraordinary thing is that the Jews believe that only the Jews can go to paradise, the Christians believe that only a Christian can go to paradise and the Muslims believe that only the Muslims can go to paradise. Now why should God, in his great justice, make somebody born that cannot go to paradise - it is absurd. Please forgive me I don't mean to say it's absurd, people made it absurd.

Awards
In November 2005, he was given a medal by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in recognition of his significant contributions to world film and cultural diversity. The medal—which is handed out very infrequently—is named after Russian director Sergei Eisenstein and can only be given out a total of 25 times by Russia's Mosfilm.

Filmography
Bibliography

- The Eternal Male (1977)
- Omar Sharif's Life in Bridge (1983)
- Omar Sharif talks Bridge (2004)
- Bridge Deluxe II play with Omar Sharif (Instruction manual)

References

1. ^ [http://hajumrahdays.com/omar-sharif-an-arab-legend/], converted to Islam in 1955 when he married Egyptian actress Faten Hamama. As of his personal life, he was born Michael Shalhoub in Alexandria, Egypt, to Egyptian Catholic parents. In a 4 September 2009 television program on Nile Cinema, Omar specifically denied published claims that his family had originated in Lebanon as often reported, and affirmed that his parents and all his grandparents
were born in Egypt. He recalled spending time in his childhood in his maternal grandparents’ home in Tanta, Egypt. He was very attached to his grandmother, ‘Abla Abdallah, who lived for more than 100 years. He graduated from Alexandria’s Victoria College, then from Cairo University with a mathematics and physics major.

"Omar Sharif's back". The Toronto Star. September 9, 2003. "He was born Michael Shalhoub in Alexandria, Egypt, on April 10, 1932, the son of a wealthy Lebanese-Egyptian family.


6. ^ ReelTalk Movie Reviews
17. ^ Al-Jazeerah English: Riz Khan Interview with Omar Sharif. Time 10:00. 2007-10-10
18. ^ Orbit: Cairo Today Interview with Omar Sharif Part 1/5. Time 9:30. 2007-10-10
19. ^ They are two of the greatest names in film history
23. ^ Introducing Omar Sharif Jr.Â | Film | The Advocate
24. ^ Omar Sharif guilty of punch attack
26. ^ Orbit: Cairo Today Interview with Omar Sharif Part 5/5. Time 5:45. 2007-10-10
27. ^ YouTube - Omar Sharif on acting, religion, and the future

External links

* Omar Sharif at the Internet Movie Database
* Omar Sharif at ElCinema.com (Arabic)
Omar Sharif, Actor: Lawrence of Arabia.  Omar Sharif, the Egyptian actor best known for playing Sherif Ali in Lawrence of Arabia (1962) and the title role in Doctor Zhivago (1965), was born Michel Demitri Shalhoub on April 10, 1932 in Alexandria, Egypt to Joseph Shalhoub, a lumber merchant, and his wife, Claire (Saada). Of Lebanese and Syrian extraction, the young Michel was raised a Muslim. He was cool to the marrow, the pharaoh of romance. Friday evening, Omar Sharif would sit in a trance. My mother and I would sit there in a trance. He was cool to the marrow, the pharaoh of romance. Sunday morning Umm Kulthum would sing. Her voice would fill our living room. The ship from Egypt always came sailing in on radio waves. And the jasmine wind, deep perfume Umm Kulthum. And the living room becomes a garden. And the TV set becomes a fountain. And the music flows in the garden. And everything grows.