

REEL SUSPECTS

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RADIO DREAMS

A film by Babak JALALI
97 min, USA, 2016
Colour, HD & DCP
Farsi, English, Dari, and Assyrian
with English subtitles

COMEDY
COMPLETED



HIVOS TIGER AWARD WINNER

**INTERNATIONAL
FILM FESTIVAL
ROTTERDAM**

2016



SYNOPSIS

San Francisco, CA — Butimar Productions presents *Radio Dreams*, a film by director Babak Jalali, which follows an eccentric Iranian writer through his travails as he pursues his ambitious goal of bringing together Metallica and Kabul Dreams, Afghanistan’s first rock band, at a satellite radio station in San Francisco.

Hamid (Mohsen Namjoo) immigrates to the U.S. to pursue his writing career and the American Dream. Instead, he winds up working at a small Iranian radio station, seeking artistic satisfaction through the esoteric programming he puts together for his radio audience. Meanwhile, the owners of the station try to cash in on Hamid’s only program that they see fit for commercial success — the bringing together of an on-air jam session with Kabul Dreams and their long-time idols, Metallica. The ensuing collision between artistic integrity and crass commercialism resonates with hilarity and a poignant message, as Hamid fights to maintain a balance between his ambitions and his moral compass.

“Radio dreams is about a man in exile wanting to bring his culture to San Francisco through music and art,” says Babak Jalali. “But he’s obstructed by the realities of commercial radio.” The all-star cast of *Radio Dreams* includes world-renowned musician Mohsen Namjoo, considered the ‘Bob Dylan of Iran,’ and currently living in exile in the United States; the members of Kabul Dreams, Afghanistan’s first rock band, residing in the San Francisco Bay Area; and a special appearance by the famed Lars Ulrich of Metallica.

Lead singer of Kabul Dreams Sulyman Qardash says Metallica represents the voice of the youth for many in the Middle East. “When I was a refugee in Uzbekistan I didn’t get to see famous bands,” says Qardash. “They don’t really travel to that part of the world. But it’s an internet era, you learn a lot. Metallica is everywhere. From the technical perspective, Metallica was instrumental in our development as a band.”

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CAST

Mohsen Namjoo, Kabul Dreams (Sulyman Qardash, Siddique Ahmed and Raby Adib), Lars Ulrich (Metallica), Mohammad Talani, Boshra Dastournezhad, Bella Warda, Keyumars Hakim, Babak Mortazavi, Mahmood Schricker, Ali Tahbaz, Larry Laverty, Mansour Taeed, Laila Shahrestani, Casimir Carothers, Litz Plummer

CREW

Director	Babak Jalali
Original Screenplay	Babak Jalali Aida Ahadiany
Producer	Marjaneh Moghimi
Executive Producer	Neda Nobari Foundation
Co-Producer	Taraneh Golozar
Editor	Nico Leunen Babak Salek
Original Music	Mahmood Schricker
Sound Mix and Design	Stefano Grosso
DP	Noaz Deshe
Production Designer	Laura Lathi

DIRECTORS'S BIOGRAPHY & FILMOGRAPHY

Babak Jalali was born 1978 in Northern Iran and has lived mainly in London since 1986. He received a Bachelors degree in Balkan/East European Studies and a Masters degree in Politics from UCL, University of London. He graduated with a Masters in filmmaking from the London Film School in 2005.

As writer/director, Jalali's short film, HEYDAR, AN AFGHAN IN TEHRAN, was screened at 60 film festivals worldwide and received a BAFTA nomination as Best Short Film in 2006. He was elected as one of six residents at the CANNES FILM FESTIVAL CINEFONDATION RESIDENCE in 2006–2007. In the Residence, he developed his first feature film titled FRONTIER BLUES in 2009. The film premiered in Official Competition at the Locarno International Film Festival in 2009 and has gone on to screen at over thirty festivals worldwide including Ghent, Sao Paulo, Stockholm, Gijon, Sofia, New Directors/New Films in New York, San Francisco, and Edinburgh. Frontier Blues won the FIPRESCI award at the San Francisco International Film Festival.

He recently completed his 2nd feature film titled RADIO DREAMS, which will premier in competition at the Rotterdam Film Festival. He is currently in pre-production on his third feature film, LAND, which is a co-production between Asmara Films (Italy), a Cup of Tea (France) and Topkapi Films (Netherlands). The film won the main production grant at Frameworks in the Torino Film Lab as well as receiving funding from CNC aides aux cinemas du monde (France), MiBACT development and



MiBACT production grants (Italy), RAI Cinema Production Fund (Italy), MEDIA development fund, Doha Film Institute production grant, The Netherlands Film Fund (Netherlands) and Eurimages production funding.

He co-produced *WHITE SHADOW* (directed by Noaz Deshe) which premiered in the Venice Film Festival in 2013 and won the Lion of the Future Award for Best Debut Film and went on to screen in the World Narrative Competition section of Sundance Film Festival 2014. He produced *SHORT SKIN* (directed by Duccio Chiarini) which was developed at the Venice Biennale Lab and premiered at the Venice Film Festival in 2014 and in the Generation Section at the Berlin Film Festival in 2015.

Filmography (as writer/ director)

2005- *Heydar, An Afghan in Tehran*. 18 mins. 35mm. Colour (BAFTA Nomination 2006)

2009- *Frontier Blues*. 95 mins. 35mm. Colour (Developed at Cannes Film Festival Cinefondation Residency) (Winner FIPRESCI- San Francisco International Film Festival) (Official Selection at over 30 film festivals)

2015- *Radio Dreams*. 91 mins. HD. Colour

2016- *Land*. 100 mins. 35mm. Colour. (Winner of Torino Film Lab Production Award, CNC aides aux cinemas du monde production award, Mibac development and production funding, Doha Film Institute production award, MEDIA development and Production fund, EURIMAGES Production Fund, RAI Cinema, Netherlands Film Fund) (Selected at Sofia Meetings, Paris Project and NCN Rome)

Filmography (as Producer)

2013- *White Shadow*. 115 mins. HD. Colour (Winner of the Luigi de Laurentiis- Lion of the Future Award for Best Debut Film at the Venice Film Festival)

2014- *Short Skin*. 85 mins. HD. Colour. (Venice Biennale College project. Screened in Berlin Generation section)

2016- *Tehran, City of Love*. 90 mins. HD. Colour (Hubert Bals Development Fund)

Filmography (as Editor)

2009- *Frontier Blues*. 95 mins. 35mm. Colour

2010- *Simon Killer*. 100 mins. HD. Colour. (Premiered in competition at the Sundance Film Festival).

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REVIEWS

VARIETY, FEBRUARY 10, 2016

A deserving Tiger competition winner at Rotterdam, Babak Jalali's California-set film mines gentle comedy from the Iranian diaspora.

Rarely leaving the claustrophobic offices of a San Francisco-based Persian specialty radio station, Iranian "Radio Dreams" is a witty, low-key exercise in deferred gratification, as the small staff wait with increasing anxiety for the day's star turn: a scheduled appearance from Metallica. The U.S. heavy-metal act has been booked to jam with Afghanistan's finest headbangers — but will Lars Ulrich and Co. show up? A Rotterdam Tiger win for writer-director Babak Jalali's Jalali's sophomore feature, which makes good on the promise of 2009's "Frontier Blues," may provide the necessary assist to help arthouse auds discover this quietly satisfying gem. Still, the pic's phlegmatic air of unassuming good humor poses a marketing challenge: It can't be presented as the kind of worthy prestige pic currently likeliest to attract attention in the Western market for Middle Eastern cinema.

It's a big day for Pars Radio. Thrash-metal legends Metallica will be dropping by the studio to jam with Kabul Dreams, here appearing as themselves: A real act from Afghanistan, inspired by Western rock, they have flown in specially to appear alongside the more established band. Under Jalali's confident stewardship, the circumscribed world of the struggling radio station becomes the perfect microcosmic stage on which to deftly play out global tensions of profit vs. art, East vs. West, isolationism vs. assimilation, and pragmatism vs. idealism.

Acclaimed Iranian folk singer Mohsen Namjoo is ideally cast as an Iranian literary grandee, Mr. Royami, now employed as the irascible station manager. With the hair of Albert Einstein, the pompous air of latter-day Bob Dylan and melancholic deep-set eyes that speak to the character's own self-image as a master of inferior puppets, he's possessed of a ludicrous idealism that elicits almost as much sympathy as it does exasperation. (Boshra Dastournezhad is a standout among the supporting players, sketching the financially astute daughter of the station owner with Aubrey Plaza levels of deadpan misanthropy.)

Royami is the heart of the film: It is his sincere and artistically principled dream of a musical union between East and West, between Metallica and Kabul Dreams, that fuels the film's engine. The memory remains of his former cultural eminence, but Royami is clearly struggling to find his niche in the U.S.; watching him, we gain the sense of a former emperor reduced to a king of nothing. Yet Royami remains an optimist, believing that in music, humanity can find the harmony that eludes us in other arenas. For him, the heavy-metal collaboration represents the possibility of peace, an olive branch offered by both sides following the horrors of the conflicts in Afghanistan.

Other interested parties sense in the rockers' guest spot a different kind of opportunity: The public interest piqued by advance word of their booking has enabled the station to sell local commercials for fast food, as well as for dermatologists specializing in the latest depilatory techniques for hirsute women. Naturally, the ads are hilariously terrible, delivered live from cheesy scripts with cheap, unrepentantly intrusive keyboard jingles. Yet they are necessary: The radio station is entirely ad-supported, a practicality that Royami would prefer to ignore.

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As the light fades and the day's programming draws to a close with no word from Metallica or their reps, Royami's vision seems to lie in tatters. Considering the preceding actions' occasional triviality — a wrestling-related subplot starts well but goes nowhere very much — the subsequent events achieve substantial emotional heft.

Suffice it to say that Metallica fans in the audience won't be entirely disappointed. Drummer Ulrich puts in a late appearance, and he's a poignantly appropriate presence for this film. As he's sometimes been the butt of jokes in the drumming community for his lack of technical prowess, his role in the success of Metallica has always been less about metronomic precision and more about street smarts, spirit and matching the character of James Hetfield's monster riffs. Likewise, the climactic jam session at Pars Radio is not about putting together a perfect virtuoso performance; it's about the warmth of what the brief collaboration so fleetingly represents.

The final result may be dictated by necessity and circumstance, but it fits the bittersweet worldview of "Radio Dreams": Nothing ever works out quite the way you hope. This idea is never more perfectly realized than when the film cuts between a heartbroken Mr. Royami, his American Dream apparently a mirage, and Kabul Dreams having the time of their lives. The concept of proud ambition strung along by a tardy celebrity playing himself in a knowing cameo is not a new one in comedy, but this level of cultural resonance feels fresh; originality often lies in the treatment of the material, not the material itself.

Lensing by Noaz Deshe (director of 2013's remarkable Tanzanian-set festival favorite, "White Shadow") retains a docu-style realism throughout, with handheld cameras evoking the likes of Greg Daniels' improv-friendly TV comedies even as the chilly palette of blues, grays and teals fosters a more downbeat mood. Strong critical support plus further festival prizes surely await; whether this can be parlayed into a successful theatrical release depends on skilful pitching from distributors. Wherever it roams, however, "Radio Dreams" should be welcomed with open arms by the Iranian diaspora, treating as it does the subject of integration with such an enjoyably light touch. Arguably, if it can connect with that audience, nothing else matters.

By Catherine Bray

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TWITCHFILM, FEBRUARY 8, 2016

Despite being brought up and educated in London, Iranian filmmaker Babak Jalali shot his sophomore feature *Radio Dreams* in the Bay Area of San Francisco. His stylistic preferences and personal signature aesthetics began to take bolder shape in his debut *Frontier Blues* (2009), shot in his hometown of Gorgan in northern Iran.

"My favourite director, considering the whole body of work, is Aki Kaurismäki, and I like the kind of deadpan humour you can find in Beckett stories", Jalali states, referencing Scandinavian cinema and absurdist literature.

Radio Dreams tells the story of several individuals, members of a displaced Iranian and Afghan collective. In the director's words, it is "an observation film about a group that happened to be a minority" on "existing in a kind of alien landscape."

The lead character, Mister Royani -- played by U.S.-based Iranian musician Mohsen Namjoo, known as 'the Bob Dylan of Iran' and recognizable by his distinctive mane -- is a respected author in Iran and manages a San Francisco-based Persian radio station with the unprecedented zeal of an intellectual, occasionally pretentious and arrogant.

El Salvadorian poetry and the history of apes in space are definitely not subjects calculated to send ratings sky-high and please local advertisers, but Mister Royani does have one ultimate coup in the making - a jam session between Afghanistan's first (real-life) rock band *Kabul Dreams* (the members basically playing themselves) and the equally authentic and iconic metal band *Metallica*.

Jalali loosely sketches connected vignettes framed by the big date with radio destiny: egos clash between Mister Royani's high-brow stab at programming and the pragmatic managerial style of the station owner's daughter. It's also a big moment for *Kabul Dreams*, eagerly awaited in front of the documentary camera. Other vignettes include one about falling in love, as well as even more surreal digressions -- for example, a homoerotic surprise in the usually indifferent radio owner -- all courtesy of the filmmaker's incidental humour dipped in a subtle medley of absurd and melancholy.

"I wanted to show the whole absurd mood of that place," the director states. The set design of what appears to be an amateurishly hammered-up studio is both the epitome of Mister Royani's unrealized ambitious and a monument to unpopular compromises, brushing up against the myth of the American dream. But the fish out of water or foreigner-in-exile scenario is only a fraction of Jalali's wider sweep, squeezing many more elements into this puzzle of a film.

Among these, *Radio Dreams* is "also about doing something which is not ideal; you have other dreams, other aspirations, but you have to compromise." The director drew inspiration from real-life Iranian and Afghan society in the U.S. and the proliferation of lo-fi and low-quality television and radio stations within Iranian communities in Los Angeles, but his sophomore feature also addresses universal issues whilst avoiding jaded clichés and running platitudes.

The combination of individual fate and personal struggle in Mister Royani and the life of the community does not create tension but variety; a minimalistic tapestry of motifs not stereotyping or

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generalizing a minority. "It is also a story of how you adjust, how you adapt, how you exist in a place you do not know, centred around individuals within a minority," the director says of how the context for *Radio Dreams* is meant to be interpreted.

Disillusion and aspiration mingle in this slightly melancholic drama, which is less a caricature and more an attempt to grasp a medley of aspects of immigrant life. By the end of the day, Lars Ulrich may even show up.

Radio Dreams won the main award - Hivos Tiger Award - in the festival's official competition.

By Martin Kudlac