

QUINZINE
DES RÉALISATEURS
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CANNES

HOW *the* ROAD

WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY PANAH PANAHI



DESIGN: POOYA ABBASIAN

HASSAN MADJOUNI

PANTEA PANAHIHA

RAYAN SARLAK

AMIN SIMIAR



HIT THE ROAD

A PANAHI PANAHI PICTURE

Iran - 2021 - 93' - 1.85:1 - 5.1 - Farsi

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SYNOPSIS

A chaotic, tender family is on a road trip across a rugged landscape, but to where? In the back seat, Dad has a broken leg, but is it really broken? Mom tries to laugh when she's not holding back tears. The kid keeps exploding into choreographed car karaoke. All of them are fussing over the sick dog and getting on each others' nerves.

Only the mysterious older brother is quiet.

INTERVIW

WITH DIRECTOR PANAH PANAHI & SERGE KAGANSKI

You are the son of Jafar Panahi, who started out as Abbas Kiarostami's assistant and disciple. We imagine that the influence of both directors gave you a taste for cinema. Did you learn to be a director directly from them, or by watching their movies?

From childhood, I attended location scouting and was on set for my father's and Abbas Kiarostami's films. My parents mainly hang out with cinema people. I grew up in this environment, so I saw many films, and that inevitably formed my eyes. Still, I hardly ever talked about cinema with my father, until I was 18 or 19. When I finally told him that I wanted to study cinema, he understood that this interest had to be taken seriously. During my studies, I was able to work both as an assistant director and cinematographer to learn first-hand. I was then able to assist my father on his most recent films, from writing to post-production, and I was able to ask him all the questions I could think of. My surroundings were very conducive to my training as a filmmaker.

The closer you get to the border, the greener and more mountainous the landscape becomes. It is as if this region were more welcoming, compared to the urban areas with heightened police pressure. Is that the case ?

The journey this family goes through was not the result of my invention: it follows the natural evolution of the Iranian landscapes. As they get closer to the border, the desert plains turn into a greener area, with many hills. Of course, other factors were taken into account in the choice of each location, but this progression of the landscape corresponds with that of the country.

Is the border in the film the border with Turkey? Are smugglers and Iranians who cross the border illegally, like your character, common in reality?

Yes, it's a common phenomenon in Iran today. I witnessed the clandestine departure of a large number of my acquaintances. The character's journey is inspired by that of a friend who told me about his own journey. All the steps, including that of buying sheepskin, are real and accurate.





We know your father, is under surveillance. Was the shooting of your film as complicated as those directed by your father? Did you take the same precautions as he does, filming in a car, or in remote and less populated areas?

We were able to shoot unhindered in the sets that were ours, that is to say in the remote areas. We had a permit to film on video. We were never worried.

The mother wears a veil but not a chador, the eldest son wants to leave Iran, the youngest son loves superheroes, the family listens to pop songs ... Are you trying to show an open, cultivated family, probably ill at ease with the current political regime?

The majority of the Iranian population live in cities and wear the same type of outfits as my characters. In fact, the chador is really worn by a religious minority. I had no intention of representing a cultured class. My approach is not sociological, my point goes beyond those considerations.

We don't know much about the father, but we can tell he is open and tolerant. Can you say more about your take on this character?

I'd like to leave the perception of the father as well as the other characters and actually the entire film to the viewers. I don't like to underline or simplify but to leave room for viewers to experiment with the film, using their own senses and forming their own interpretations. Life and art are packed with paradoxes and they are richer if we are left to explore them individually. It's about creating an opening, an elevation above the limitations set out by norms, to create surprises that trouble and enchant (I hope so at least). The Dad character is certainly something of mystery to me. He partly embodies my future, just as the two brothers represent moments of my past.

In the scene where a motorist wants to report a leak from your characters' car, the characters fear that he is a police officer. Is this fear of being under police surveillance widespread in Iran, or specific to this family because their son is going to cross the border illegally?

At the time of writing this scene, I was still unaware of where my inspiration came from. The more I think about it, the more I realize that we have always lived with this feeling, that we are being watched, that someone is listening in on us. This is how it was for my family, but I'm sure it was the same for the families of a lot of artists and intellectuals, on whom the regime exerts constant pressure. So it was more the expression of this underlying feeling than a conscious choice on my part while I was writing this scene.



Is the dream sequence where father and son take to the stars an homage to 2001, A Space Odyssey, which you cite earlier in your film?

While writing this sequence, I realized I was indeed designing it based on the Kubrick film. I eventually decided to make it an homage, make it an explicit reference.

A final question on the family: is this family a fictional version of the Panahi family?

I didn't want to portray a certain type of Iranian family, let alone my own. However, I'm sure that unconsciously I created these characters based on my own experience, and of family relationships as I observed them.

Can you introduce us to the four main actors of the film?

Hassan Majnooni and Pantea Panahiha are two great stage actors whose careers I have followed closely over the years. The collaboration with them was a very happy one. They helped me a lot on set, with many aspects of directing, not only working with actors.

Rayan Sarlak, who was 6 at the time of filming, had starred in a blockbuster TV series that I hadn't seen. When I started my research, everyone told me to watch it. From our first meeting, I knew he would be the perfect younger brother. He had a very professional attitude on set and a taste for work which I found fascinating, given his age. Even though directing him took a lot of energy, I really enjoyed working with him.

Amin Simiar, the big brother studies drama. I first chose him based on a photo and when I met him I was immediately convinced. The synergy between the four of them worked very well and I took immense pleasure in leading them.

Can you introduce us to your cinematographer, Amin Jafari, and tell us how you worked with him?

I met Amin Jafari on the set of THREE FACES, my father's film. We quickly became friends and I immediately thought of him for the cinematography on HIT THE ROAD. But he did more than that. He was a true big brother for me, even a therapist who, on set, knew how to calm my nerves, help me find solutions, facilitate my decision-making, discuss framing choices. I am very grateful to him for this generous collaboration.







In some shots, not so much the ones in the car, but rather the wide shots where you see a path, one seems to feel the influence of Kiarostami. Did he inspire you?

It has become quite difficult to shoot a wide shot from a car in Iran without drawing a comparison to Kiarostami's work. These kind of comparisons always seem to always arise with Iranian filmmakers, whereas elsewhere in the world, young directors can shoot without constantly being compared to more senior directors, or to being accused of plagiarism. Despite all my attachment to Kiarostami's cinema, I find this comparison too easy.

How did the editing with Ashkan Mehri and Amir Etminan work?

Amir Etminan was present with me on the set. At night, after we finished filming, we would work on the rough cut of the film. Then, back in Tehran, I was able to work with Ashkan Mehri in a more focused way to polish the editing. They were both very valuable, as we discussed the sequence of shots and the structure of the film.

Shall we discuss the songs heard in the movie? Are they popular songs in Iran? Are they tolerated by the regime?

These songs are hits that we all grew up with in Iran. They date from before the revolution and I find it very painful to see the disastrous development of pop, if not all of Iranian music, in recent decades. I jumped at the chance to choose these pieces which resonate beautifully with the content of my film. The regime does not tolerate these songs and frowns upon their use: they were sung by artists who had to flee abroad after the revolution.

Did your father give you any advice on writing or directing the film?

I wrote the script on my own and had my father read it once I felt it worked. While it was the opposite of Jafar's cinema, he immediately got on board and gave me great advice. From that point on he took on the role of advisor, which he plays to many young filmmakers and he was a continuous support by my side. Especially in the post-production phase, his help saved me.

Has he seen the movie? If so, what did he think?

My father really likes the film, but he is undoubtedly not objective: he sees it with the gaze of a loving father who supports his child.



DIRECTOR'S PROFILE

Panah Panahi was born in Tehran in 1984 and studied cinema at the Tehran University of Art. While attending, he directed his first short film which went on to participate in and win awards at many domestic and international film festivals. At that time, Panah also served as a member of the jury at Osian's Cinefan Festival of Asian and Arab Cinema.

Later, Panah became a set photographer, working professionally on several films, then moving into the roles of assistant cinematographer and assistant director. Eventually Panah acted as a consultant, editor and assistant director on Jafar Panahi's most recent films.

HIT THE ROAD is Panah Panahi's first feature length movie.

CAST AND CREW

CAST

Hassan Madjooi - Dad
Pantea Panahiha - Mom
Rayan Sarlak - Little Brother
Amin Simiar - Big Brother

CREW

WRITER & DIRECTOR Panah Panahi
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY Amin Jafari
SOUND Abdolreza Heydari
EDITOR Ashkan Mehri & Amir Etminan
MUSIC Payman Yazdanian
PRODUCERS Panah Panahi & Mastaneh Mohajer