



fish

*A Lion Returns*  
(Australia 2020)

**Spoiler alert: You may prefer to read this review after the screening**

DIRECTOR : Serhat Caradee

RUNNING TIME : 91mins

RATING :

**Synopsis:**

Jamal unexpectedly returns [to Sydney] from Syria where he has been involved with a terrorist organization.

**Review: Sandra Hall**

Jamal Alamein has returned to his family home in Sydney's western suburbs to see his dying mother. But first he has to run the gauntlet — a series of lacerating encounters with loved ones he betrayed with his decision to go to Syria and join Islamic State.

First up is his older brother, Omar (Danny Elacci), an academic who subjects him to a long and bitter interrogation. Then, pushed to exhaustion, Omar reluctantly agrees to try smuggling him inside without anyone else knowing.

This means that he must corral everybody into the back garden so Jamal (Tyler de Nawi) can have a few minutes alone with their mother in her darkened bedroom. These manoeuvrings take on the black comic aspect of a human chess game, and it's clear from the start that they're doomed.

Director Serhat Caradee's dogged but punchy script is expressly designed to tease out the family schisms that led to Jamal's defection and he's not going to be let off lightly. Before the day is done, all main players have their say and the shaky foundations of his resolve is tested to its limits.

Partly crowd-funded and shot in just 10 days, the film is a companion-piece to Caradee's *Cedar Boys* (2009), about a trio of young Lebanese-Australians whose resentments and frustrations at the prejudices they face lead them to become drug runners. It's also a model in the art of small-scale film-making. Confined to house and garden, Caradee's cast banish any hint of claustrophobia with the potency of their pain and outrage. Cont.

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**FILMS IN THE SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS INC**

10.00 am Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2022

8.15 pm Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> April 2022

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## Review: Cont.

Omar's role is to reiterate the extent of the damage – the police surveillance, the ostracism and finger-pointing that the family has suffered. With all this laid before him, Jamal fires up, countering with the accusation that they're all "whitewashed Arabs" and that his brother is ashamed of being Muslim. He becomes so enraged that he pulls a gun, leaving them both horrified and chastened.

It's a turning point that allows them to disinter their feelings for one another and talk. Childhood memories surface and Jamal reaches the stage where he can confess his disgust at Islamic State's cruelty towards the girls and women they captured and enslaved.

He's still hiding in the garden when round two begins. He's spotted by his young son and discovered by his wife, Heidi (Jacqui Purvis), and she, like Omar, is blazing with hurt and indignation. She reminds him that he is the reason she converted to Islam. When he asks her why she's not wearing the scarf, she tells him that it's no longer a religion she can defend. Effectively stripped of the bluster that he's been stoking in preparation for the whole ideal, he finds that he's been reduced to just one sentence: "It's complicated".

Underlying all these exchanges is the big question: how did he manage to sneak back into the country without being caught? And what can we infer from the ambivalent attitude of his uncle, Yahya (*Cedar Boys'* Buddy Dannoun), who has always been his confidant and supporter? Most important of all, it's plain nothing will be decided until Jamal is forced to confront the person who dominates the family – his father, Yusuf (Taffy Hany), a terse, implacable presence who spends most of the film sitting in the garden running a set of worry beads through his fingers.

To both Omar and Jamal, their father represents a one-man obstacle course. Jamal's life has been blighted by Yusuf's conviction that he would never amount to anything, while Omar, the family's high achiever, still regards him as someone to be handled with great care. Both sons know all too well that pride has always been more important to him than love.

Caradee's script is probably too verbose and much of it is predictable. It's hardly an original story but it's told with such conviction and his actors pack his dialogue with such a charge that there's a wealth of family history in every word. Consequently, you can read the constrictions dictated by its setting as a metaphor for the theme at its stormy heart.

Source: [www.smh.com.au](http://www.smh.com.au) Sandra Hall 4/11/2020 Accessed 8/5/2021

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## COMING UP:

May	<i>Portrait of a Lady on Fire</i> [France]	Sunday 15 <sup>th</sup> & Tuesday 17 <sup>th</sup>
June	<i>Only the Animals</i> [France/Germany]	Sunday 19 <sup>th</sup> & Tuesday 21 <sup>st</sup>
July	<i>A War</i> [Denmark]	Sunday 24 <sup>th</sup> & Tuesday 26 <sup>th</sup>

## **Some Thoughts on: *Golden Voices***

This gentle little piece of cinema from Israel had me in a bit of a bind. Despite some lovely, (the rendezvous between Raya and her stuttering, obsessed caller), and amusing, (Victor's friend's compliment, 'He made Kirk Douglas sound like a decent actor. '), moments throughout, I felt, overall, the film was underdone, lightweight and not really achieving it's potential. Indeed, the term FISH Lite, sprang to mind at its conclusion.

I loved the character Raya, who got on with accepting the difficulties in finding work in a new country, and who, by adapting her vocal skills, out of necessity, so successfully, really got the ball rolling for both of them. Her performance was warm, amusing and very endearing. Victor, however, was a sullen bully, dominating their situation and depicting a very unpleasant, unreasonable and violent nature.

This tension and the decline in their marital relationship was deserving of a much greater, more intense treatment than it received here.

When Victor aggressively, selfishly and cruelly smashed the filmic record of their greatest professional moments together, because of Raya's choice of employment, the question of why he was accessing the very service that he was so furious about, was never examined.

Instead we had a very soft and sentimental 'reconciliation' as our couple moved on. Raya, darling, you should have gone with your heart and cleared off with your lovely, rose bearing, number one admirer. That cafe scene was just fabulous.

Finally, I did enjoy viewing this outing, but was disappointed because it could have been so much more, building on the great premise of their location and situation and professional backgrounds.

Despite that, full marks for the brilliant, faulty light switch conclusion to the film. Just wonderful!

## **Ross Armfield.**

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### **Actor/Director : Serhat Caradee**

The award-winning Australian filmmaker regularly switches between working behind and in front of the camera. His second feature *A Lion Returns* was released to critical acclaim in 2020 and made it onto *The Guardian*, *The Australian*, *Flicks* and *Filmink Magazine's* Top 10 Australian films of the year. The film also received AACTA and ADG nominations.

Caradee's directorial debut, *Cedar Boys* (2009) was accepted into 6 international film festivals and won the 'Audience Award' at the 56th Sydney International Film Festival along with nominations from the Australian Directors Guild (ADG), Australian Writers Guild (AWG) and AACTA (AFI).

Turkish born Caradee came to Australia when he was two years old. He grew up in Homebush and had a passion for sport and martial arts but eventually chose a career in acting, theatre and drama

## Message from the President

At a time when there is so much misery in the world *Golden Voices* provided the light entertainment I think we all need. I hope you enjoyed its quirkiness as much as I did.

For those who missed the screenings, it was announced that in order to return to normal FISH procedures in May we will be asking you to renew membership at a cost of \$30 to cover you from January 2023 till June 2023.

We hope to see you at our screening of the Australian film, *A Lion Returns*.

**Sandra Gillespie.**



### FILMS IN THE SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS INC

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