



fish

*Hit the Road*  
(Iran 2022)

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

DIRECTOR : Panah Panahi  
RUNNING TIME : 93 mins  
RATING :

**Synopsis:**

A family trip is the occasion for humour and heartbreak. What makes this film so memorable and devastating is the way it explores normal life under duress. An unseen, oppressive force – presumably some aspect of the government – imposes its will on them.

**Review: A.O. Scott**

Dad is grumbling in the back seat, which he shares with his motormouth 6-year-old son. The two of them mock and provoke each other like a vaudeville double act, with an element of physical comedy provided by the cast on the father's leg, which limits his movements and sours his mood. The peanut gallery, up front, consists of the older brother, who is driving, and his mother, who is wittier than her husband but less of a show-off.

The four of them enjoy getting on one another's nerves, which is part of what makes them a family. All in all, they are good company. In real life, you might not want to be stuffed into a car with these people – and let's not forget their dog, Jesse – on a dusty stretch of Iranian highway, but from the first jokey moments of *Hit the Road* until its heartbreaking end you will not want to be anywhere else.

Not that this film, the first feature directed by Panah Panahi, is exactly *Little Miss Sunshine*. The reasons for the trip emerge slowly, as do the hints of anxiety and sorrow that creep into the good-natured banter. The family members have all agreed to leave their cellphones behind (though not all of them have done so), and they worry about being followed. Their vehicle, a beige S.U.V., is borrowed. Property has been sold and favours called in. This isn't a vacation.

**Cont.**

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**FILMS IN THE SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS INC**

10.00 am Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> June 2023

8.15 pm Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> June 2023

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## Review: Cont.

The older son must leave the country. We don't know why, but we can infer that the alternatives are grim. He and his parents try to keep this information from the younger boy, who is told that his brother is going off to get married. It's not clear that he believes this, but he is protected by the blissful narcissism of childhood as well as the warmth and patience of his mother and father.

The destination is a remote, rural border area, where other families in similar circumstances are camped out, making the best of a sad, uncertain situation. Panahi, whose father, Jafar Panahi, is one of Iran's leading filmmakers, has a storytelling style that is at once clear and elusive. The personalities of the four people in the car are strong and distinct; you're on familiar terms with them even before you learn their names.

But they're also mysterious, and not only because basic questions — Where do they live? What do they do for a living? How did their trouble start? — remain unanswered. The more time you spend with them, the more complicated each of them becomes, and the more you feel the weight and strength of the bonds that connect them.

Hassan Madjooi, who plays the father, is a large, saturnine presence with a special kind of charisma. Hobbled by his leg injury and humbled by age, the character hides a large, tender heart behind a scrim of sarcasm. His wife (the remarkable Pantea Panahiha) clearly has long practice in dealing with his moods and deflecting his darts. The older son (Amin Simiar) is an introvert; his brother (a serial scene stealer named Rayan Sarlak) is very much the opposite.

Family life, on the road or off, often involves competition for space. Everyone needs both emotional support and room to breathe, and nobody gets everything they want. That much is normal. What makes *Hit the Road* so memorable and devastating is the way it explores normal life under duress. An unseen, oppressive force — presumably some aspect of the government that has harassed Panahi's father for more than a decade and tried to prevent him from making films — imposes its will on them. That invisible cruelty makes the tenderness and good humour of this movie all the more precious, and almost unbearable.

Source: [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com) ~ A.O.Scott 21//4/2022 Edited extracts accessed 16/11/2022

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## COMING UP

July	Fire of Love [USA/Canada]	Sunday 16 <sup>th</sup> & Tuesday 18 <sup>th</sup>
August	Quo Vadis Aida [Bosnia-Herzegovina]	Sunday 20 <sup>th</sup> & Tuesday 22 <sup>nd</sup>
September	A Hero [Iran]	Sunday 17 <sup>th</sup> & Tuesday 19 <sup>th</sup>
October	The Blue Caftan [Morocco]	Sunday 15 <sup>th</sup> & Tuesday 17 <sup>th</sup>

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## **Some Thoughts on: *The Rose Maker***

I must admit I was not particularly expecting very much from this film. I felt it was probably going to be a very 'lite' outing with very little real substance to it, allowing the roses and a well-worn plot to carry the movie through a cliched and formulaic one hundred minutes. Well, I was right and I was wrong.

Initially, I felt smugly correct. The stereotypes were all in place. The good hearted, hardworking lead character down on her luck, the business in trouble, the team of unlikely misfits and social outcasts sent to rescue the situation and, of course, the villain of the piece, a greedy and somewhat sleazy rose mogul wanting to absorb the business into his own. Surprise, surprise. Of course, when the glorious shots of the fields filled with gorgeous, colourful blooms appeared, looking something like an advertisement that the Rose Producers Association or the French Tourist Board would have been proud of, my cynical self thought I'd picked it in one.

As the film progressed however, I found my hard, (some would say harsh), opinions softening and changing quite a lot. Yes, many of those clichés and overly sentimental characteristics were there, but I found some of the actual performances quite skilful and affecting. The relationship between Eve Vernet, the pipe smoking, hard-working traditional rose grower and the reformed (?) delinquent, Fred, was quite moving as his back story was revealed. The film developed a warmth and involvement and humour, (even when their unlikely rose heist took place), that softened my original suspicions.

The film was beautifully shot; the roses, the flower farms and the surrounding rural landscapes were all extraordinarily delightful to the eye and the soundtrack was very effective indeed.....especially the credit opening, '*Red Roses for a Blue Lady*'. Most of all though, there was a real sense of heartfelt emotion in the closing scenes.

I've come to the conclusion that, even though I'm not enthusiastic about the 'lite' genre of storytelling, like all genres they can be made well or not. Overall, I felt this was one of the better ones. Obviously immensely enjoyed by the majority of the audience, sometimes just a feel-good film is just the ticket for an uplifting visit to the cinema.

Time to wake up and smell the roses though now, the pressure is really on for us to all lift our respective gardening games and produce blooms somehow approaching the quality roses featured in those spectacular farms.

**Ross Armfield.**

## Message from the President

Thanks to those who have renewed your FISH membership. Your cards for the new season will be posted to you in June with information on screening dates.

Please note there will be an abbreviated newsletter in July as our printer takes a well-deserved break. Reviews of upcoming films will be available on our website.

We have been asked to inform you of a special screening of the documentary, *Watander, My Countryman*. This film follows the experiences of Afghan refugee, Muzafa Ali, since his arrival in Australia. Ali explores his connections to the Afghan cameleers of the past and their relationship with ancient indigenous culture. The film will be screened on Wednesday, 14 June at 6.30 pm and will be followed by a Q and A session with Muzafa and the film's director.

Once again, I would like to express our gratitude to Ross Armfield for his review of *The Rose Maker* and remind you that we would be happy to receive reviews from any of our members.

Sandra Gillespie



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