



**NEW RELEASES**

# Hit the Road

If modern Iranian cinema already has one family filmmaking dynasty established in the Makhmalbafs (father Mohsen, followed by daughters Samira and Hana), step forward a second second-generation talent. Panah Panahi, son of the infamously banned director Jafar (*The White Balloon*, 1995, *Crimson Gold*, 2003), studied cinema, worked on several of his father's later projects and here makes his own stunning debut feature.

As the title suggests, this is a road movie, a family trip by Mom, Dad with his leg in a cast, the eerily taciturn young adult son who drives their packed SUV, his hyperactive little brother and an ailing dog in the back. We're never explicitly told their names, where they're going or even why, though the older brother's marriage arrangements are vaguely cited. At first, when his parents realise their youngest has smuggled a cell phone along to play music, it seems like a mere cheeky prank – until the mother cuts up the SIM card and promptly hides the handset off-road.

There's genuine anxiety when they think they're being followed, though it turns out to be a motorist concerned at their vehicle leaking oil, rather than state surveillance. For all the good-natured insults and feisty bickering – the film is consistently very funny – suddenly Panahi will hold a little longer than expected on a pensive close-up, imperceptibly darkening the mood. The route gets more and more rural, mountainous, misty. Disguised bikers appear urging clandestine meetings further ahead and the mysterious purchase of a sheepskin.

To reveal more would rob the film of its narrative surprises. What does need to be shared is the expert balance of knockabout humour and slowly tightening tension, intimate cramped car sequences and extended long takes against wide vistas. Impromptu karaoke scenes to Iranian pop tunes can switch from hilarious to heartbreaking in an instant.

Eventually what comes into focus is a tale of family flight and survival, sudden loss and stoic perseverance. That Panahi Jr is able to weave together slice-of-life realism with a *2001: A Space Odyssey*-inspired, floating-among-the-stars fantasy sequence is testament to not just his range of influences (the delicate humanism of his father is highly evident) but his ambition. He's aided by the superb performances of his central cast, stage actors Hassan Madjooni and Pantea Panahiha as the parents and long-lashed natural Rayan Sarlak as the firecracker kid.

Criticism of his country's authoritarian regime and the psychological toll it takes on ordinary people is implicit in every stage of the journey but achieved with the lightest of touches. For ultimately, as with much of the enduring work of his father and other recent Iranian cinema icons, from Abbas Kiarostami to Asghar Farhadi to the Makhmalbafs, these are stories both culturally specific and able to evoke universal experiences that connect beyond borders. To achieve something of comparable stature to these greats in his late-twenties, with a first film, bodes well for, one hopes, Panah Panahi's long, rewarding, unrestricted career. In which case, it's well worth hitching a ride right from the start.

**Leigh Singer, [bfi.org.uk](http://bfi.org.uk), 11 July 2021**

## **Interview with the director Panah Panahi**

*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.

*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.

### **Production notes**

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## HIT THE ROAD

*Director:* Panah Panahi  
*©:* JP Film Production  
*Production Company:* JP Productions  
*Producers:* Panah Panahi, Jafar Panahi, Mastaneh Mohajer  
*Line Producer:* Mastaneh Mohajer  
*1st Assistant Director:* Negar Joneydi  
*Written by:* Panah Panahi  
*Director of Photography:* Amin Jafari  
*Editor:* Ashkan Mehri, Amir Etminan  
*Visual Effects Supervisor:* Mohammad Sanifar  
*Costume Designer:* Masha and Sara Khamisi  
*Music:* Payman Yazdani  
*Sound:* Abdolreza Heydari  
*Sound Mix:* Zohreh Ali Akbari

## Cast

Hassan Madjooni (*dad*)  
Pantea Panahiha (*mom*)  
Rayan Sarlak (*little brother*)  
Amin Simiar (*big brother*)

Iran 2021©  
94 mins

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## NEW RELEASES

### Hit the Road (Jaddeh Khaki)

Continues from Fri 29 Jul

### The Feast

From Fri 19 Aug

### Where Is Anne Frank

From Fri 19 Aug

### Queen of Glory

From Fri 28 Aug

## RE-RELEASES

### The Big City (Mahanagar)

Continues from Fri 22 Jul

### Paris, Texas

Continues from Fri 29 Jul

### The Harder They Come

From Fri 5 Aug (+ intro by season curator and author Lloyd Bradley on Fri 5 Aug 18:15)

### Burning an Illusion

From Fri 19 Aug

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