



PREVIEW

Winners

+ Q&A with director Hassan Nazer and producer Nadira Murray

Director's Statement

Winners is a story of a nine-year-old boy's passion for cinema and the reawakening of an old actor's love for the medium, a man who has forgotten and buried his identity because of the hardships of his life.

I wrote the script bearing in mind how films allow us to dare to dream, how cinema is a perfect escape. When I had my synopsis and treatment for *Winners*, I decided to meet with Reza Naji himself, my childhood icon.

I remember he arrived in worn clothes, looking a little aged, and he immediately took an expensive looking box from his old bag.

Inside – wrapped in red velvet – was his Berlinale Silver Bear (for Majid Majidi's *The Song of Sparrows*). The statue was extremely sacred to Mr Reza. He is a very simple artist living a very simple life and often unemployed. He's so caught up in surviving daily life in Iran, he sometimes forgets his achievements!

Casting non-professional children was my aim for *Winners*. They were natural and sometimes rough with each other, how kids are. And they delivered my childhood vision.

As a young boy I grew up in Garmsar selling plastic to make money to buy and rent DVDs, to also escape from my own hardships. Those films kept me in a dream-like place.

And Parsa Maghami (Yahya) also comes from Garmsar. In his audition, he seemed very close to how I was as a boy. Without any rehearsal, Parsa understood what I wanted and for me, he was Yahya, very natural and real in front of the camera.

Winners is a peaceful offering, a reminder of classical Iranian films and celebration of the work of all Iranian artists as well as world cinema. I wanted to tell a story that's a bridge between my two homes (UK and Iran), that ties cultures peacefully and harmoniously together through universal themes, with a message that hardship can be overcome through hope and dreams.

Diversity is important to me. In the film, I wanted to give voice to a silenced, unheard and under-represented minority. In Iran there are over one million Afghan refugees living in hardship, so I chose to make two of my main characters a widowed Afghan mother and her son (Yahya), to give them voice and raise their profile.

Personally I am against all forms of discrimination and as a filmmaker with first-hand experience of this life, I am strongly pro-refugee. As well as paying tribute to Mr Panahi and other great artists' achievements, *Winners* should remind the audience to be aware of its environment and those in need around us.

Location is extremely important to me. Location is a character without dialogue. In this production, I had to fight with the authorities to use authentic locations for the story. For instance, the landfill site. Shooting carefully with the

children on top of those mountains of rubbish was so important to me. That's how I grew up running around with my friends!

And *Winners'* main location – the city of Garmsar – is very earthy and dry beneath those peach-like hills. And Padeh Village itself, a historic silk-road village built around its crumbling ancient citadel, everything eroded by the wind and rain.

This is where I was born and grew up, and bringing these locations to the screen generates a great sense of nostalgia in itself.

My hope and vision for *Winners* was to create something unique and interesting from my own background – to tie two cultures together – to tell a story close to where I grew up – to draw an audience inside Iranian culture – to appreciate everyday life in my village and to enjoy the colour and sounds of that land.

In Arash Seifie Jamadi, I chose a cinematographer who could capture the essence of this world. We wanted to create an inviting and welcoming picture of Iran, to reflect its beauty and offer the audience a great experience for 85 minutes!

I have been living in the UK for over two decades now. *Winners* is a homage to my native country, uniting my vision as filmmaker with my nostalgic memories of childhood, where my culture and the landscape of Iran is so important to me.

Production notes

Hassan Nazer is a British writer/director of Iranian origin, based in Scotland. Starting life as a child actor in Iran, from an early age Hassan was involved in directing for the stage and short film. He studied theatre at the Art University in Arak before leaving Iran for Europe as a refugee in 2000. Aged 18, he arrived in the UK before going on to study film and media in Aberdeen in 2006.

Hassan's previous feature films have been released in Iran and internationally: *Black Day, Here Iran, Utopia, and The Check Post*. His latest *Winners* is co-financed by Screen Scotland and financed and produced by Sylph Productions and World Film Productions in association with Edge City Films (all UK). *Winners* won the Audience Award at the EIFF 2022, as well as being the official UK submission for the International Feature Film category at the 95th Academy Awards (2023). It has been longlisted by BIFA Raindance Discovery Award.

Hassan was a Jury Member at All Lights India International Film Festival (ALIIFF), SAARC Film Festival and for BAFTA Scotland. He is a member of the Producers Guild of Iran.

Nadira Murray grew up in Central Asia during the Soviet Union era and has been living in the UK for almost 20 years. Both her parents worked as theatre actors and she was immersed in the arts from a young age; working as an actress and going on to study European Theatre Arts at Rose Bruford (2006) and Drama Studio London (2007). She eventually found her passion lay behind the camera as a writer, director and producer.

Nadira studied at the Media Business School (Ronda, 2014) before establishing her company Sylph Productions, which aims to connect East and West through audiovisual experience and promotes ethnically diverse voices

in UK. Her short films have travelled across the world and taken part at many Oscar and BAFTA qualifying film festivals.

Nadira recently attended Rotterdam Producer's Lab (2020) where she secured a commission to produce *Fracture* (Jon K. Jones), a sci-fi short for 20th Digital Century / Hulu.

Winners is Nadira's debut feature as a producer. In the midst of other successes with the film, she has been selected for BIFA Springboard, a yearly pioneering programme designed to support emerging UK producers and received a nomination for BIFA's Breakthrough Producer Award (2022).

<https://www.sylphproductions.com/>

<https://twitter.com/NadiraMurray69>

WINNERS

Directed by: Hassan Nazer

a Sylph / World Film production

In association with: Edge City Films

Presented by: Creative Scotland

Executive Producer: Jennifer Armitage

Produced by: Nadira Murray, Paul Welsh

Line Producer: Mohsen Mosaferchi

Director of Photography: Arash Seifia Jamadi

Editors: Dave Arthur, Hassan Nazer, Reza Jouze

Production Designer: Mohammad Mohammadi

Colourist: Colin Brown

Original Music by: Mohsen Amini, Mohammad Saeed Shayan

Sound Designer: William Aikman

Re-recording Mixer: John Cobban

Cast

Reza Naji (*Nasser Khan*)

Hossein Abedini (*Sabir*)

Mahmoud Jafari (*Karam*)

Parsa Maghami (*Yahya*)

Shahzad Kamalzadeh (*post office manager*)

Malalai Zikria (*mother*)

Helia Mohammad Khani (*Leila*)

Rahman Mohammadi (*Jafar*)

UK 2022

85 mins

Courtesy of Modern Films

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Hassan Nazer

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