

## Little Zizou: As warm as a caress

By Khalid Mohamed | *The Asian Age* | March 14, 2009

Cast: Boman Irani, Shernaz Patel, Jahan and Iyanah Bativala

Direction: Sooni Taraporevala

Rating: \*\*\*\*

Swing a hip to this marvellous mambo Parsiano. Oozing nostalgic music, dancing through dhansaak-scented neighbourhoods, and revealing little secrets of community living, here's a movie that you want to hug. Mwaah, and you want more.

Salaam Sooni Taraporevala, then, who leapfrogs auspiciously from scriptwriting to direction. More than just cooking up a Parsi-centric plot, she creates a carnival of characters, each one harbouring distinct anxieties and dreams. That's Little Zizou for you aka Xerxes Khodaiji, all of 11 years and praying every night to his (late) mom that she should somehow prod his Soccer Idol, Zidane, to visit April Mumbai. Sweet?

Yes but hardly feasible. Unlike Beckham who showed up to Bend it.., Zidane doesn't show up in flesh and blood before Xerxes (Jahan Bativala). Fairly introverted, the boy merely smiles wanly as he relates (kind of) to his fuzz-headed graphic artist brother (Imaad Shah) and represses his deep-seated aversion to his religiously bigoted father (Sohrab Ardeshir). How the boy's eyes hiss.

Gratifyingly, Xerxes finds emotional sustenance in the kind Mrs Pressvala (Zenobia Shroff). Indeed, the surrogate child-mum relationship is the most moving aspect of Taraporevala's screenplay, lyrical and extremely delicately handled, celebrating the point that selfless bonds are possible even in these days of rank cynicism.

So what if the Khodaijis and the Pressvalas are feuding madly? That's for the families' men – the bigot (Sohrab Ardeshir) and the reformist newspaper editor (Boman Irani) -- to sort out. Throughout, the slice of Parsiana is seen essentially through Zizou's eyes, fogged occasionally by the spritely little girl (Iyanah Bativala) who doesn't want to share her mum's love with the motherless Zizou. The two kids, at a moonlit Udwada beach, are a lovely sight – even as a batty old grandma (Mahabanoo-Mody Kotwal) holds court like an Empress in her grand hotel now in a shambles.

Encompassing a range of subjects – from childhood dreams and teenage love to exploitation in the name of religion – above all, Taraporevala's dramedy is a critical and yet compassionate comment on her community. She celebrates their eccentricities and their elegance with high regard and humour.

Technically she is aided expertly by cinematographer Himan Dhammija, art director Amrita Singh and couturiers Arjun Bhasin and Shahnaz Vahanvaty

Of the cast, Jahan Bativala is a delight, spontaneous and sassy. Iyanah is a thorough natural. Mahabanoo Mody-Kotwal, Boman Irani, Zenobia Shroff, and Shernaz Patel as the fundamentalist bigot's ditzy aide, are first-rate. A thumbs up also goes out to John Abraham for his cool cameo.

Go for this emotional caress of a movie right now.