



BABA JOON was screened by Kino Ken at the Manor Theater in Squirrel Hill, Pennsylvania as part of the 2016 Pittsburgh Jewish Film Festival. Below is his review of that subtitled feature drama.

12 of a possible 20 points

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Israel 2015 color 91 minutes in Hebrew and Persian with English subtitles live action feature drama Metro Communications Producers: Leon Edery, Moshe Edery, David Silber

Key: *indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance

(j) designates a juvenile performer

Points:

- 1 Direction: Yuval Delshad**
- 1 Editing: Yoni Tzruya**
- 1 Cinematography: Ofer Inov**
- 2 Lighting: Dror Zinman (Gaffer)**
- Special Visual Effects: Einat Telem**
- 0 Written by: Yuval Delshad**
- Script Supervisor: Keren Sternfeld**
- 2 Music: Eyal Saeed Mani***
- 1 Production Design: Yuda Acco Art Direction: Yoav Dahari**
- Set Dressing: Louise Bracha***
- Costume Design: Dani Bar Shai**
- Makeup: Shiran Cohan**
- 2 Sound Supervising Sound Editor: Gil Toren**
- Sound Effects: Idan Rawet**
- Sound Recordist: Moti Hefetz**
- Casting: Noa Ella**

1 Acting
1 Creativity
12 total points

Cast: Navid Negahban (Itzhak Morgian, Moti's dad), Asher Avrahami (j) (Moti, Itzhak's son), David Diann* (Uncle Dariush), Rafael Eliasi (Baba, Moti's grandfather), Viss Elliott Safavi (Sarah), David Ben-Avraham (Moti's teacher), others

BABA JOON won the most recent Ophir Award in Israel as Best Picture and was consequently that nation's official submission for the Best Foreign Language Film Oscar®. It concerns increasingly strained relations between a traditionalist Jewish father of Iranian descent and his mechanically talented son.

Moti, an adolescent boy, is being raised on a turkey farm in the Negev Desert of southern Israel. He has no great love for those birds, is awkward in handling them, indeed dead opposed to clipping or killing the creatures. This puts him on a collision course with his father Itzhak and Baba. Grandfather and Papa expect Moti to carry on their family's tradition of poultry farming. Indeed, their patronym refers explicitly to that very vocation.

Moti's preference is to tool around in a go-cart of his own construction, an activity considered a complete waste of time by male elders. Until the arrival of Uncle Dariush, who has launched a lucrative jewelry business in the United States. Dariush has no wish to return to the stagnant condition of virtual bond service Baba expects of his children. Like Moti, he detests turkeys, freeing himself from those odious creatures at the earliest opportunity years earlier, a desertion causing brother Itzhak by default to become maintainer of the farm. Dariush's excuse for his behavior is a claim Itzhak loves the work.

Not so.

However, Itzhak intends to leave behind a tangible, financially secure legacy for his only son. That's the Jewish way. He has no desire to reject it. If Moti insists on being defiant, then Itzhak will resort to paternal authority. And, if necessary, turn to violent compulsion, applying strength rather than reason.

One early episode of confrontation between father and son involves the best method to compensate for a leaking truck hose. Moti knows a better way than his elder for dealing with the problem promptly and preventing deaths of overheated poultry exposed to prolonged searing sunlight. Itzhak resists being advised by a junior, much less his son. Being in charge is opiate and obsession for him, a trait incidentally passed on to his descendant. Along with a stubborn will to avoid changes of mind, a second characteristic Moti either copies or inherits.

Another faceoff occurs at Hebrew School, where Moti balks at summer reading of proverbs, using as cover his family's relative poverty. When the teacher proposes to give him a book copy gratis as an act of charity, Moti spurns the offering in disgust and shame, adding

profanity to taunt the pedagogue, who responds by banishing him from class. That's quite satisfactory to Moti, less so to his father when he arrives to drive the boy home. Upon hearing details of his son's embarrassment before schoolmates, Itzhak brings Moti back to the classroom, challenging the teacher to justify his actions. When that is attempted through throwing superior education in the face of farmer Itzhak, Moti's father is himself angered. He demands not that his son beg forgiveness of the scholar but vice versa. That order is reinforced by bullying, impressing upon Moti the superiority of passion over conservatism, a lesson he takes to heart and applies himself against Itzhak with increasingly alienating results.

A spiral of negation and punishment follows. Moti's beloved racer is demolished, Papa's water tank gift scorned, a controversial barn sign created to publicize Moti's partnership in operating the farm, something unilaterally decided without his consent.

Uncle Dariush encourages the boy to pursue handicraft interests, even harboring him in a separate location when Itzhak threatens to whip an unrepentant challenger. Tutoring Moti in the craft of jewelry making, Dariush allows him to experience the thrill of selling his own creations.

All this does on the home front is cause further aggravation to Itzhak and Baba, neither of whom relish Dariush's meddling in domestic affairs.

When Itzhak falls off a ladder while attempting to nail into place his father-son partnership sign on the family barn, Dariush is compelled to resume detested poultry-raising duties in place of a temporarily incapacitated brother. Moti has to leave his refuge and return home, where sympathetic mama and supportive uncle struggle to defend him from authoritarian paternal demands.

Baba, still nostalgically languishing in exile from Iran, lives in the past, listening to music from his homeland and talking of happy times there long ago. He cannot fathom changing traditions and will cede power only to his one obedient son. Embittered at Dariush's blandishments enticing Moti to consider accompanying him to North America, Baba orders the tempter to go back overseas. He's no acceptable solution to their difficulties, only increasing them.

Finally, in an act of total estrangement from forebears, Moti opens wide the family's barn door, permitting turkeys free egress to wander wherever they would, a blatant metaphor for his own liberation from sheltered imprisonment. How will Itzhak respond when Baba urges him to whip the lad for insufferable defiance?

A predictable story arc, mostly less than sympathetic characters, and a preset contemporary notion of instant gratification sink the film as persuasive drama. Conflict is too rigidly structured in calibrated episodes incrementally building to a climactic faceoff. The director seizes upon every possible opportunity to champion the contemporary and criticize

tradition. This creates a one-sidedness removing all traces of suspense, seriously crippling dramatic possibilities.

Cinematography privileges the picturesque rather than communicating striking images. Like director Yuval Delshad's screenplay, it settles for merely satisfactory achievement, lacking originality and power.

Eyal Saeed Mani's music, to the contrary, conveys richly Iranian Jewish colors, investing the movie's focus family with at least some degree of solid connection to its past.

Lighting and sound are of excellent quality.

Set dressing by Louise Bracha seems to credibly recreate the environment of a family struggling to find stability in a foreign land resisting settlement.

Standing out from the rest of the cast is David Diann as Uncle Dariush, the only really likeable personality onscreen. Everyone else is either a wimp, inordinately selfish, cruelly dictatorial, or power crazed.

First-time feature film director Delshad needs to grow considerably in his skills. He doesn't demonstrate here a talent for eliciting superior performances from his cast. Operating from a screenplay overdependent on expletives and devoid of any surprises, he fails to present a compelling reason for audiences to care about his characters or the outcome of their domestic struggles. Hopefully, his next outing will evidence maturation with regard to overcoming these deficiencies.

Due to an abundance of expletives, BABA JOON, which translates to something like DEAR FATHER or DEAR SON, is only suitable viewing for adults.

The current reviewer is obliged to Zomitsa Staneva's review of October 2, 2015 at www.popoptiq.com for enlightenment about some distinctively Jewish elements incorporated into the movie.