

## Asian Festival of 1st Films: Little Zizou (Opening Film)

By Stefan S | A Nutshell Review | December 04, 2008

Source: <http://anutshellreview.blogspot.in/2008/12/asian-festival-of-1st-films-little.html>



**Mind It!**

The Asian Festival of First Films return this season with a lineup of fresh movies by first time filmmakers, both on the technical and acting fronts, but don't succumb to the notion that the lack of experience would translate to the big screen. In fact, you would be hard pressed at wondering just how high standards have been, that rookie films would be of high quality and production values. From the list of nominees showcased in teaser clips form, I am in no envy of the three person jury - Nadia Tass, Tikoy Aguiluz and Yim Ho - to decide the winners of the various awards dished out on 10th Dec 08.

Little Zizou is the Opening Film of the festival this year, and it's up in the running for multiple awards, for Best Film, Best Actor (Jahan Bativa), Best Actress (sister Iyanah Bativa), Best Producer (team of Dinaz Stafford, Vandana Malik and Sooni Taraporevala) and Best Director for Sooni Taraporevala as well. Folks familiar with Mira Nair films, would find Sooni a familiar name in the credits, being the scribe for the works such as Salaam Bombay, Mississippi Masala, and for the screenplay of The Namesake.

It's a satire of sorts to the tune of Romeo and Juliet. We have feuding families whose children fall in love, or at least one of them is infatuated with the other, but parental objection gets in the way. Art (Imaad Shah) is a talented comic artist who falls for Zenobia (Dilshad Patel), and is up for a tough fight because she's in love with John Abraham err in a glorified cameo as Arjun. Tough fight you'd say, but nothing tougher than facing the objection of her father Boman (Boman Irani), a newspaper

publisher and staunch disbeliever and critic of Art's father Khodaiji (Sohrab Ardeshir), who prophets himself as the protector and new messiah of a new-age spiritual faith called Back to Purity, who's building his own army of followers called PLO - Parsi Liberation Organization.

I thought it also bore some some parallels with Danny Boyle's Millions, where the titular character of Zizou aka Xerxes (Janhan Bativala), is a young boy who is without a mother, but constantly pines and speaks to her photograph. His dream and largest wish at this point in time is for his football hero Zinedine Zidane to visit Mumbai, and hopes that his mother would love him enough to grant him that miracle from heaven. Otherwise, he'll be off on his own, skipping school and hanging out at Boman's home, to the liking of his wife, but to the jealousy of her child Liana (Iyanah Bativala) who deems him to be snatching away prime affection from her mother.

These relationships present some interesting narrative threads on which the movie develops, and there are numerous funny moments fused into the story, which brings forth some hearty laughter. And it's the myriad of subplots involving so many characters in the movie, that makes it one interesting film that borders on spiralling all over the place and out of control, but never does. It's quite whimsical in nature as well, and in her director's notes, Sooni explained that she had also set out to explore her own community called the Parsis, and I guess unless you're familiar with the community, you might be lost at some of the nuances. Fear not though, as you can read more about it from the film's [official website](#).

But what I found to be real, and probably the stark heaviness in theme in the movie, is the portrayal of the dangers of religious fanaticism. Needless to say in these troubled times what such fanaticism can bring about, but it also tells of how the gullible can be exploited by those in a position of power and trusted (blind or otherwise) faith, and how such positions can be abused not for the good of mankind, or for love, but to incite hatred for fellow human beings. I believe that all religions speak of love for the neighbour and doing good, but it's left to the sometimes flawed interpretation by man, so therein lies the danger for false prophets to profit and exploit from.

With some good delivery and wonderful sets, Little Zizou is a strong contender for the awards it got nominated in. Being family friendly with feel good messages, this is definitely one crowd pleaser.