



## BORDERLINES FILM FESTIVAL

### **HIT THE ROAD (12A)**

Director: Panah Panahi

Starring: Hassan Madjooi, Pantea Panahiha, Rayan Sarlak

Iran, 2021, 1 hour 33 minutes SUBTITLES

The first feature by Iranian filmmaker Panah Panahi is an intimate family road movie – you're crammed into a small car with four people, one of them a very exuberant young boy, and a dog for most of the duration of the film – with a destination that is alluded to, but very much an unknown quantity, both for the viewer and for the car's occupants. The film won the Sutherland Award for Best Film at the BFI London Film Festival in 2021.

Panahi is the son of celebrated Iranian director Jafar Panahi, who is not just banned from leaving Iran, but is also forbidden to make films after being tried and found guilty of 'propaganda against the state,' though he continues to film in secret. Several of his films have previously been shown at Borderlines including *Taxi Tehran* and the 2018 winner of the best screenplay award at Cannes, *Three Faces*.

In an [online interview](#) for New York Film Festival Panah Panahi talks about his early engagement with the filmmaking process. The origins of *Hit the Road* go back to his own experience. At one point, his father received veiled threats from the authorities that they would get at him through his daughter, and the urgency of her having to secretly leave the country has a strong resonance in the film. A poignant mixture of joy and melancholy pervades the movie and Panah describes the influence that his leading actor, Pantea Panahiha, who plays the mother, had on him.

"When I met her what I found really striking were all the emotions she can express, all these subtle changes, shifts that you can observe in her face, and this ability she has to make us pass from one emotion to the other. This complexity was something I found very inspiring and as a matter of fact as I was writing the script and developing the characters, I was really inspired by this change of mood, this subtle way of developing the mood of the film through her character. It became obvious that she was the one pulling the strings emotion-wise, of the film. It was very important to have this change of mood that would be 'underwater', that wouldn't be something very obvious... I wanted it to be very understated."

*Hit the Road* was filmed in remote areas of Iran with a regular permit but the fear of surveillance is pervasive. "The more I think about it, the more I realize that we have always lived with this feeling that we are being watched. That someone is listening in on us," says Panahi in an interview with **Variety**.

The film also features songs that are unlikely to sit well with Iranian censors since many of the artists are among those who fled abroad. "These songs are hits that we all grew up with in Iran that date from before the revolution"

Notes compiled by Jo Comino