



# Bahrani's Film 'Goodbye Solo' Anything but Garden Variety

By AMIR TALAI  
Epoch Times Staff

Although the exotic sounding birth name of director Rahmin Bahrani and the beauty of his films might give the impression of an auteur with an accent and high-brow vernacular, the American born director is as American as apple pie or his hometown of Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

Bahrani recently sat down with The Epoch Times to discuss his most recent film, "Goodbye Solo," and the world that he creates through his characters—a world that is anything but garden variety.

Bahrani's last two films are noted for taking a protagonist with an unusual set of circumstances. In "Man Push Cart," that character is Ahmad, a former Pakistani rock star who sells coffee and donuts at a push cart in Manhattan. In "Chop Shop," the everyday hero is Alejandro, a Latino street orphan working at an auto-body shop struggling to make a better life for himself. These characters represent a piece of the melting pot that is America, but they also have their quirks that make them unique individuals.

And despite any struggles they encounter, the happiness in their hearts draws the audience into the film. The same quality is present with his lead character Solo in his new film "Goodbye Solo."

Based on a real person Bahrani met while in North Carolina— anonymously named "O" for anonymity—Solo (Souleymane Sy Savane) is a genuine and sincere smooth-talking Senegalese cab driver in Winston-Salem who picks up an old rough Caucasian southerner, William (Red West). His customer is quiet, yet belligerent. The two begin an unlikely friendship, as Solo attempts to use the time to positively influence William's despair. Bahrani emphasizes that his character Solo, like



**UNLIKELY FRIENDSHIP:** African actor Souleymane Sy Savane (R) plays Solo, a Senegalese taxi driver living in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, who befriends his customer William, played by veteran actor Red West, in the film "Goodbye Solo." COURTESY OF ROADSIDE ATTRACTIONS

his other characters, are as real as it gets. They are not supposed to be part of a fairy tale, but of the reality we live in as Americans and humans in the world.

"[Solo and my other characters] are real people ... and they are connected more by their poverty than their ethnicity, which means that now they are even more connected with the people in this country and this world."

"These are not marginal characters ... these are the majority ... hand to mouth, small home, modest dream, trying to get by and that doesn't mean sad and depressing. Usually it means that's it ... and they are usually enjoying their life."

The character Solo, who has his

own struggles, through a much labored and sincere style, wins over his taxi fare, the hard-headed William, as a friend, much like Bahrani wins over the audience of his films with his extended-shot, cinematic style, directing, and editing.

"I like to stay with things ... I think that is important because it gives the viewer a chance to enter into those characters."

"For example when people saw 'Man Push Cart' they were like oh, is Ahmad still pushing a cart? Or is Alejandro in 'Chop Shop,' did you get him into school yet? Or man, what about Solo, is he still in North Carolina?"

"One of the reasons why people get so invested into these characters

and feel that they are real is you had a little second to live with them. The scene isn't done just because they are done talking."

Bahrani was hesitant to point to a particular intention or meaning to his new film "Goodbye Solo," which won the prestigious FIPRESCI International Critics Prize Venice Film Festival award in August of 2008.

"How to love someone unselfishly. How to love someone even more than yourself, even if it is painful to you ... and to accept that. The final shot of the film, the road, is an acceptance of life, which is more important than us. I believe firmly in the importance of a human being's action's to another person that is paramount."

# Documentary Review: 'Brothers at War'

By JOE BENDEL

After they screened Jake Rademacher's debut documentary, Gary Sinise agreed to sign on as an executive producer and John Ondrasik of the band Five for Fighting was inspired to write a song based on its central characters. Yet despite the considerable star-power bestowed on Rademacher's very independent film, New York was not part of its recent opening, instead screening predominately in markets near large military bases.

Too bad for the deep blue City, because Rademacher's "Brothers at War" is a deeply personal and humane examination of the Iraq War, as well as its impact on both the American soldiers fighting there and the families they left behind.

With two younger brothers serving in Iraq, the political has become the personal for actor Jake Rademacher. Wanting to better understand their deliberate decision to serve in a time of war, Rademacher went to Iraq with a bare-bones camera crew to answer the Capra-esque question of why they fight. Yet, "Brothers" is first and foremost about family with all else being secondary.

Though his youngest brother Sgt. Joe Rademacher is home between deployments when the filmmaker Rademacher arrives

in Iraq, the middle brother, Capt. Isaac Rademacher, is happy to embed him on missions that will give him a representative taste of the Iraqi War experience. If not directly in harm's way, Rademacher was certainly within harm's reach, eventually filming a live fire fight and an IED (Improvised Explosive Device) attack. When the Captain is unexpectedly transferred to the States for special training, Jake finds himself in the unlikely position of being the only Rademacher brother then in the war zone.

Rademacher's film can honestly be called even-handed, resisting blanket assumptions about the state of Iraq and the men serving there. Some regions of the country are shown to still be quite dangerous, while others appear relatively safe. We see the Staff Sgt. in charge of training Iraqi troops express pride in their performance under fire, but ambushes and IEDs remain a fact of life.

Many soldiers do indeed express eloquent patriotism when asked about their mission, like Spc. Christopher Mackay, who tells Rademacher matter-of-factly: "I'd give my life for America any day. Wouldn't think twice." However, another enlisted man is more ambivalent on the mission and conflicted about his pending re-enlistment deadline. Still, he agrees with his father's assessment that "the caliber of the person you're going



**FAMILY PORTRAIT:** Jake Rademacher (L) traveled to Iraq to document his two brothers' service in the war. The result is a complex and unbiased portrait from the perspective of those serving. SAMUEL GOLDWYN FILMS

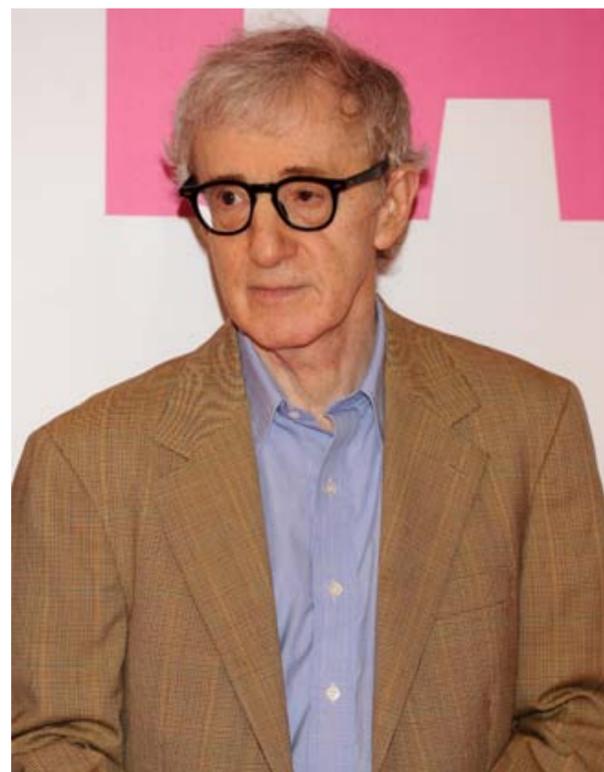
to be working with in the military is better than the caliber of the person you're going to meet ninety percent of the time anywhere else in the world."

At times, "Brothers" packs a real emotional punch. Surprisingly, Rademacher's most moving interview is not with a serviceman, but with Ali, an Iraqi translator working with the troops. He has lost family, including a brother, to the insurgents in retaliation for helping the American forces, but he still expresses idealism and hope for the future.

"Brothers" is neither rah-rah boosterism or propaganda of any stripe, but honest filmmaking. The men serving with the Rademachers are allowed to speak for them-

selves, unfiltered by any editorial preconceptions. Rademacher is also brutally honest depicting his own fraternal relations, showing the open tensions between him and his youngest brother. Throughout it all, viewers will become heavily invested in the Rademacher brothers as characters in a very human drama. Truthful and complex, "Brothers" is a very compelling documentary that should not be dismissed by partisans on either side of the war debate.

Joe Bendel blogs on jazz and cultural issues at <http://jfbspin.blogspot.com>, and coordinated the Jazz Foundation of America's instrument donation campaign for musicians displaced by Hurricane Katrina.



**OPENING ACT:** Woody Allen's new film "Whatever Works" starring Larry David will open this year's Tribeca Film Festival, taking place April 22-May 3. CARLOS ALVAREZ/GETTY IMAGES

# Woody and Spike Headed Downtown

The popular New York based directors will debut films at Tribeca

By DEE CARLISI

After detours through London and Barcelona, Woody Allen returns home to launch the 2009 Tribeca Film Festival with the premiere of "Whatever Works" on April 22.

"Whatever Works" is Allen's first film since 2004's "Melinda and Melinda" to take place in New York City. The Brooklyn born writer and director has spent the last several years abroad creating movies, such as recent hit "Vicky Cristina Barcelona," which won a 2009 Golden Globe for Best Musical or Comedy, as well as an Oscar for Supporting Actress Penelope Cruz.

While neither Penelope Cruz nor past Allen muse Scarlett Johansson ("Match Point," "Vicky Cristina Barcelona") appear in his new film, "Whatever Works" is not in need of a leading lady. Evan Rachel Wood, most widely known for her role as Mickey Rourke's estranged daughter in "The Wrestler," fills in.

In the dark comedy, Wood plays the naïve and much younger, southern wife of Larry David ("Curb Your Enthusiasm"). Much like his television persona, David's character in the film is grumpy and eccentric and manages to get caught up in some romantic entanglements involving his wife's parents. Patricia Clarkson and Ed Begley Jr. also star.

Allen's film, "Whatever Works," distributed by Sony Pictures Classic, is slated for a summer 2009 release.

**Spike on Kobe**

The Tribeca Film Festival announced that Spike Lee's new ESPN produced documentary "Kobe Doin Work" will have its world premiere during the festival. This will be the third year that ESPN has partnered with Tribeca to present a special subseries of independent, sport-related films.

Lee's new film is essentially a day in the life of the basketball star during the Lakers' run to the NBA finals last year. Another interesting feature of the film is that Grammy-winning musician Bruce Hornsby contributes his first film

score, as well as the original song "Levitate."

**Tribeca History**

Robert De Niro, along with producer Jane Rosenthal, started the Tribeca Film Festival in the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks, as a way to revitalize downtown Manhattan neighborhoods. The festival organizers estimate it has brought in \$530 million in economic activity to the city since its inception. Now in its seventh year, the festival has screened over 1,100 films from more than 80 countries and remains a way to celebrate the spirit of New York.

Expect the festival to feature big-budget studio flicks, as well as smaller independent films and documentaries. Past premiers at the festival have included "Star Wars Episode II: Attack of the Clones," "Mission Impossible III," and "Speed Racer."

Beyond movies, the Tribeca Film Festival also organizes an array of community activities, such as a family street fair, panel discussions with actors and directors, and "Drive-In" movies along the Hudson River.

**2009 Festival**

Over 5,000 film entries were submitted for consideration for the 2009 festival. Films making the cut this year include comedies "Serious Moonlight" with Meg Ryan and "City Island" starring Andy Garcia. Greenwich Village resident Matthew Broderick will also be on hand. His romantic comedy "Wonderful World" is part of the line-up.

Advanced ticket packages for the festival are now on sale to the general public. Tickets for individual movies run at \$15 a flick and will be available in April. Film screenings are held at theaters throughout Manhattan.

You can learn more about the Tribeca Film Festival, check out the calendar of community events, and read up on the feature films by visiting [www.tribecafilm.com/festival](http://www.tribecafilm.com/festival). The festival runs through May 3.

Dee Carlisi writes on pop culture and lives and works in New York.