

Film Review: Hip-hop dream in ‘Gully Boy’ is music to the ears



CHENNAI: Stories about slums and poverty are not easy to script. They can easily turn into vulgar celebration, as Danny Boyle’s “Slumdog Millionaire” was seen by some, notably legendary Greek filmmaker Theo Angelopoulos.

But director Zoya Akhtar (“Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara” and “Luck by Chance”) manages to steer herself clear of slipping into this trap with her latest drama, “Gully Boy,” which emerges from one of the biggest slums in the world, Dharavi, in Mumbai.

There, thousands of people living in a sprawl of huts have a bewildering variety of experiences to narrate. One story is that of Murad’s (Ranveer Singh), whose chance meeting with a rapper, Sher (Siddhant Chaturvedi), opens a magical door.

The film, inspired by real-life rappers Naezy and Divine, focusses on Murad’s ambition to become a rapper, and how he achieves it, despite his driver father’s fears and his uncle’s disdain.

In one scene, the uncle tells Murad that a chauffeur's son can only hope to be another chauffeur, a servant in other words. A humiliated Murad takes this to heart, but quietly vows to transform his dream into reality.

His sweetheart Safeena (Alia Bhatt), who is studying to be a doctor, pushes him towards a hip-hop life.

Written by Akhtar along with Reema Kagti, "Gully Boy" is undoubtedly the director's career best, and Ranveer's too. In a role that literally overshadows his earlier outings (including "Bajirao Mastani" and "Padmaavat"), he brilliantly conveys the angst and struggle of an underdog, and how his unflattering social status attracts ridicule even among those merely aspiring to be rappers.

Ranveer infuses into Murad a quiet determination that helps him cross frightening social and cultural barriers.

Safeena is also imaginatively fleshed out as a fiery woman who helps Akhtar create his own brand of rap music (some grippingly done by Naezy and Divine).

What is even more exciting is that "Gully Boy" brings rap out of the shadows and in this process the city and the slum, sensitively lensed by Jay Oza, seem to be screaming that miracles are possible even in the face of Mumbai's painful inequities.
