



# Cannes basks in *The Past*

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**By Gautaman Bhaskaran**

**I**ranian director Asghar Farhadi's *The Past* is a beautifully written, crafted and acted movie screened as part of the ongoing Cannes Film Festival Competition. *The Past*, much like Farhadi's 2011 *A Separation*, which won the Foreign Language Oscar, is about family and children.

Both paint wonderful portraits of how relationships among screwed-up adults affect children — and deeply.

Although *The Past* is not as intense or gripping as *A Separation*, Farhadi's Cannes player is nonetheless a disturbing picture of how modern families grow dysfunctional. What is also missing in *The Past* are the rather convoluted Iranian judicial, political and religious systems, for the movie is set in Paris, unlike *A Separation* whose story unfolded in Tehran.

*The Past* opens in a masterful manner when we see *The Artist* actress, Bérénice Bejo, portraying Marie, at the airport trying to catch the eye of a man, Ahmad (Ali Mosaffa), across a glass partition. He turns out to be her husband, who is returning to Paris after a four-year-separation to sign the divorce papers.

Marie wants Ahmad to stay at her place, not in a hotel, hoping that he would talk her teenage daughter Lucie (Pauline Burlet), out of her tantrums and sulky mood. Estranged from her father in Brussels who was once married to Marie, Lucie is fond of Ahmad and does not want her mother to marry her third lover, Samir, (Tahar Rahim). The family is not just this: there are two other children, one Marie's little daughter and Lucie's sister, and Samir's little boy.

Marie is all set to marry Samir, but there is something that seems to be holding her back. Perhaps she is not sure that she wants to close her ties with Ahmad. Another part of her uncertainty about letting Ahmad finally go and getting into a

more permanent relationship with Samir is the fact that his wife is in a coma following her attempted suicide.

*The Past* has marvellous detailing. Look at the way Lucie passes Samir the teapot across the dinner table (he can't take it without burning himself); the way Ahmad helps Marie (who has a sprained wrist) change gear on the way back from the airport; and so on.

Also, shifting the movie into top gear are performances which are uniformly captivating. For Bejo and Rahim, Cannes has proved to be a super launch pad.

As one report says: Bejo shimmered on-screen in Cannes two years ago in *The Artist*, her director husband Michel Hazanavicius' vivacious silent homage to Hollywood's Golden Age. It went on to win five Academy Awards, including best picture. Rahim was the breakout star of the 2009 festival in Jacques Audiard's poetic and brutal prison drama *A Prophet*, as a youth growing to manhood behind bars.

"It was quite a miracle for me," Bejo said in an interview. "Two years ago my life changed a little bit in Cannes ... I don't think Asghar Farhadi would have cast me in this film if I hadn't done *The Artist*."

After her screen test, Bejo did not hear from Farhadi for a month. She thought that it was all over. "He said to me, I was looking into your face if I could see the doubt," she said. "I guess because he saw me in movies where I was quite positive, quite sunny, quite glamorous. He needed to see if I could show another part of myself — and I guess he found it."

Both Bejo and Rahim thought that it was a dream come true to have worked with Farhadi. *The Past* is his first film to have been shot outside his home country.

What is also fascinating about *The Past* is that it is one of the several movies at Cannes this year which have hopped borders. *The*

*Jimmy P.: Psychotherapy of a Plains Indian* stars France's Mathieu Amalric and Puerto Rican actor Benicio Del Toro. Another French filmmaker, Guillaume Canet, has a multinational cast including Clive Owen, Billy Crudup and Marion Cotillard in his New York crime drama *Blood Ties*.

## High Drama

Cinema played out on the streets of Cannes and in the corridors of its hotels.

The awfully wet spell at Cannes last week hardly ruined the celebrations at the Film Festival. If stars continued to walk the famed Red Carpet in their glitzy designer dresses, captured in all their alluring poses by the tens of photographers who never say die, there was a whole lot of excitement happening away from the steps of the Grand Theatre Lumiere.

At a star hotel, a couple of kilometres from the main Festival venues, thieves escaped with Chopard jewels worth more \$1mn on Friday. The burglary was a neat, well executed affair with the robbers getting to the safe from an adjoining room through a

connecting door. Cinema indeed — it seemed like one of those classic heist plots we have seen on the screen.

The jewels were to have been loaned to some of biggest stars, set to walk the Red Carpet. Now, if you found some of the necks barren or ears less ornamental during the evening star parades, remember someone else must have been all decked up somewhere else.

Not just this. Also on Friday, a live television broadcast — showing two jury members, Christoph Waltz (*Inglorious Basterds*, *Django Unchained*) and Daniel Auteuil, being interviewed — was interrupted when gun shots were heard, and a man was seen running away with a weapon. Waltz and Auteuil were quickly whisked off the stage. Photographs showed a man being pushed to the ground by the police. Nobody was hurt though.

But all this added that dash of thrill on those grey days when rain poured on the French Riviera.

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*Past* has an Iranian director and a largely French cast.

French director Arnaud Desplechin's made-in-America

