Review: Saudi film 'Valley Road' is a delightful dramatic comedy with heart

JEDDAH: Saudi film "Valley Road," penned and helmed by Khalid Fahad, is a delightful dramatic comedy about a 13-year-old mute boy named Ali (Hamad Farhan). The feel-good work closed out the recent Red Sea International Film Festival and was a fitting tribute for the event.

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Fahad — who won the American Film Award and the Best Short Film Award at the Saudi Film Festival for "Little Bird" and the Golden Eagle Award for "The Investor" (2017) — places Ali at the center of a fable-like story.

Ali is mute, but selectively so which only his elder sister, Siham (Aseel Omran), understands. She is certain that his so-called disability is part of his character. She thinks he is perfect as he is and hopes her education in a neighboring city will help her to earn and pull the family out of poverty. Well meaning and cheerful, she is against any treatment for Ali, but their father, Nasser (Naif Khalaf), obstinately believes that the boy needs medical care.

So, Nasser takes Ali on a trip across the scenic countryside to meet a local doctor. But the lad gets lost on the way and then begins the hilarity. Alone in what appears to be the wilderness, he embarks on a series of partly imaginary adventures, and realizes that he is perfectly capable of taking life's challenges head-on. He realizes he may even be able help others in distress, a policemen who is part of the large canvas of characters.

Fahad has written "Valley Road" so that the characters evolve during the course of the film with the father's change being the most visible. Above all, the movie works as a metaphor for the need to place faith in children and not to underestimate their intelligence.