

## Son of a Lion

Australia / 92 mins / Gil Scrine Films  
Screening August 21  
Director Benjamin Gilmour  
Writer Benjamin Gilmour (in collaboration with the people of Kohat and Darra Adam Khel, Pakistan)  
Producer Carolyn Johnson (with Benjamin Gilmour, Jeff McDonald)  
DOPs Haroon John, Benjamin Gilmour  
Editor Alison McSkimming Croft  
Composer Amanda Brown  
Key cast Niaz Khan Shinwari, Sher Alam Miskeen Ustad



Australian Benjamin Gilmour's docudrama *Son of a Lion* is a father/son story set in the remote tribal region of north-western Pakistan in the small village Darra Adam Khel, renowned for its gun making. The guerilla shot film was a response from Gilmour to the raging post 9/11 Islamophobia around him in London and back home from his "educated, intelligent" friends. He sought to show an alternative view of the Pashtun people by whom he had been hosted on a chance voyage in August 2001.

With the script re-worked in collaboration with the locals, the film follows the story of 11-year-old Niaz who wants to go to school and his father's resistance of him abandoning his family tradition of gun testing. It's a premise that easily opens a narrative that creates a platform for the local point of views on tradition, terrorism, education and tribal codes. Charming and real, the characters are played by non-actors from the village who trusted Gilmour's motivations and wanted to share their story despite the potential dangers of their collaboration.

Gilmour's direction is tender and impressively fluid as a first-time filmmaker and cinematographer. What makes the film stand out from citizen journalism and other novice filmmaking is the sensitivity of the direction – there is a



resonating bond between filmmaker and subject. And then there's the strength of the post-production. While some of the footage was shot a year later when producer Johnson sent Gilmour back for more (despite his fear of being caught in an area deemed illegal and dangerous even for local journalists) we hardly notice the slides in "goat continuity" due to the engaging storyline through McSkimming Croft's edit and the stunning and emotive soundtrack by Brown.

It's easy to see why *Son of a Lion* has been a festival gem. At Berlin Film Festival, the film was applauded for its boldness and authenticity. It has also screened to audience and critical success in Pusan, Marrakech, Edinburgh, Seattle, Hong Kong and was recently an audience favourite at Sydney Film Festival. It is now making its way through the New Zealand, Melbourne and Brisbane film festivals. According to Johnson, the film has rated well amongst Sensitive New Age Parents, particularly men who remember being a teenage boy longing to break away, but are now themselves fathers. It also appeals to ex-travellers.

RUBY BOUKABOU

## The Square

Australia / 105 mins / Roadshow Films  
Screening July 31  
Director Nash Edgerton  
Writers Joel Edgerton, Mathew Dabner  
Producer Louise Smith  
DOP Brad Shield ACS  
Editor Luke Doolan  
Key cast David Roberts, Claire van der Boom, Joel Edgerton, Anthony Hayes, Peter Phelps, Bill Hunter, Lucy Bell, Hanna Mangan-Lawrence



When the straight-laced, 40-something Ray (Roberts) decides to run away with Carla (van der Boom) for love, never in his dreams would he have imagined painting himself into a corner like this. The run-of-the-mill construction site manager is told about a bag of money which his 24-year-old mistress believes could be their answer to a better life together – a stash hidden in the attic by her petty criminal husband Smyth (Hayes). Carla suggests to Ray that they steal it, burn the house down and then run away.

Ray approaches a small time arsonist (Joel Edgerton) to do the deed, which inadvertently takes the life of Smyth's mother. Like sparks setting off huge fires, Ray finds himself spiralling down from one paranoia onto another and becoming a loose cannon, more so after he discovers a blackmail note.

Playing solidly on Murphy's Law that anything that can go wrong will, *The Square* is a brilliant, gritty action drama that keeps its audience engaged precisely though the rhythmic and finely tuned nature of its storytelling.

First-timer van der Boom plays a fitting role, her sinister innocence

adding to the experience of the story – which, one feels, could go either way at every juncture. Her character cleverly offsets that of Roberts and, although their on-screen relationship does not feel sexually charged, she depicts an appropriate charm that explains why someone as ordinary as Ray would do anything for her. Roberts, in his depiction of a bored married man merely hoping for a better love life, moves the situation from deadpan innocence to a catastrophe waiting to happen, and this unravelling provides a gripping central motivation for the film.

Even as a first-time feature, Nash Edgerton – renowned here and in the US for his fast paced short format work along similar lines of lads, cars and loot – manages to stage Ray's emotional turmoil with consistent cuts and tight action sequences in an almost perfectly engaging manner. "Almost" only because Ray's character, or any character in this film for that matter, does not seek to inspire empathy. Instead, *The Square* engages its audience with its highly entertaining storytelling through cleverly written plot twists and turns, even up to the climax.

ZONA MARIE TAN

