

## Sooni Taraporevala Takes 'Little Zizou' to Granada, Olé!

By E. Nina Rothe | DNA | June 13<sup>th</sup>, 2009

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*Photograph: Sooni Taraporevala by Farrokh Chothia ©2009*

When members of the press were treated to an afternoon screening of 'Little Zizou' this past November in NYC, surrounded by my distinguished colleagues I knew I was experiencing magical history in the making. A personal, from-the-heart, thought-provoking film with real characters 'Little Zizou' has since gone on to receive wonderful accolades, multiple festival awards and enjoyed 50-plus days success in most metropolitan Indian cinemas.

Now Xerxes – the boy with a dream to meet soccer great Zinedine Zidane– along with his feisty girl friend Liana, his romantic dreamer of a brother Artaxerxes, his religious fanatic father Khodaiji, the lovable and respected Boman Pressvala and his beautifully warm wife Roxanne are going to grace the Cines del Sur Film Festival in Granada, Spain for three screening beginning with Tuesday, June 16th at 5.30 p.m.. I predict the Spanish audiences will fall head over heels in love with this intimate slice-of-life story based in the Parsi

community of Bombay but appealing to the hopeful, tender optimist in all of us.

I recently sat down with the film's writer and director Sooni Taraporevala, best known for her long lasting collaboration with Mira Nair as the screenwriter behind such Nair-directed hits 'Salaam Bombay', 'Mississippi Masala' and 'The Namesake'.

We had a lovely leisurely breakfast together at a Hollywood hotel, ahead of a typical day of film-viewing cultural avalanche at the Indian Film Festival of Los Angeles. Personally, I have experienced some interviews so exciting that I simply couldn't wait to get back to my computer and begin working on them, while others I wished would never end as the person sitting across from me was just that interesting. For the first time, with Ms. Taraporevala I experienced a combination of both. Her beautiful voice and delightful personality made me wish the morning would never end, while my excitement grew at the thought of being able to bring her views and ideas to the Chic Today readers. So, without further ado, I give you Sooni Taraporevala!

**CHIC TODAY:** You have lived in such diverse cities as LA, Bombay and NYC...

**SOONI TARAPOREVALA:** And Newark, NJ!

**CT:** What do you like most and least about each city and which one is your favorite?

**ST:** I like Bombay the best because that's home for me and it's the city I grew up in. It's the city I am most used to. I love the crowds, the smells, the noises of Bombay and every other city I have lived in, I always compare it to Bombay. So New York compares the most favorably because it's most like Bombay — you know the smell of urine, the crowds, the energy and it's a culturally diverse city. That complete sense of life being in your face all the time. You can't escape it, it's right there. So I would say Bombay comes first, New York comes second and LA comes last! In LA, I love the weather... I only like New York in the spring and summer, I can't stand it in the winter, as it's a totally different city with the cold weather and I find it utterly depressing. In LA the weather is gorgeous but when I was living here it just felt like such a one-industry town. It felt so removed from real life, very empty, almost numbing in a way.

**CT:** What inspired you to become a screenwriter at first and then what pushed you to go even further and tackle directing?

**ST:** Luck By Chance, TRULY!

**CT:** The movie?!

**ST:** No, real luck by chance! My life has been totally unplanned and I never thought I'd be a screenwriter. It just so happened that I met Mira [Nair] in college and we really hit it off, bonded, became really good friends and had similar interests. We knew we wanted to work together at some point, so we worked on 'Salaam Bombay' and that was such a hit. Then, I found myself with a career as a screenwriter. I was a photographer before that. Again, photography also wasn't planned, since before that I was studying Cinema Studies, which is theory and criticism.

**CT:** Is that what you studied at NYU?

**ST:** Yes. Most normal people would study that and go into academics, teach as that would be what you do with such a degree. I did it because I enjoyed it, had a scholarship... So there has been no sort of immediate logic to my life. But I think in my own way, everything has helped, indirectly. Being a photographer really helped me with screenwriting. It helped me more than doing a degree in screenwriting. Because I think that if I had gone that route I probably would never have made it. I would have either gotten bored or thoroughly confused and dropped out.

**CT:** Why did you choose to direct 'Little Zizou' yourself?

**ST:** For twenty years I had just written scripts commissioned by other people and never actually written a script for myself, a spec script. In June 2005 I went to 'The Namesake' shoot in Kolkata and came back, had a little bit of spare time and I had been thinking of an idea — it was just a kernel of an idea. So I started writing and started enjoying myself so much and it just grew into this wonderful story. I had all these people in mind, actors and locations and wrote it in 10 days. During that time, I would go out and meet somebody and they would work themselves into the story. For example Tino Francorsi — who plays Tito Fellini — I met him at a party, had no idea if he could act. I introduced myself to him, found out that he was half Parsi half Italian and that's how the character happened. And later, of course, much after the script was written, I met him and said "Well, do you want to try out for this?" and thankfully he could act. So the script was very much inspired by real life, and that's maybe why it's such an odd script, because it's melding things that are quite disparate into one.