

Little Zizou

By Nikhat Kazmi | *The Times of India* | March 12, 2009

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Film: Little Zizou (Drama)

Cast: Boman Irani, Xenobia Shroff, Imaad Shah, Jahan Bativala, Iyanah Bativala

Direction: Sooni Taraporevala

Duration: 1 hour 41 minutes

Critic's Rating: ★★½

After penning some of the most gripping scripts for crossover films like *Salaam Bombay*, *Mississippi Masala* and *The Namesake*, Sooni Taraporevala tries her hand at direction. And what a deft hand! For, her debut venture is a sheer delight, both stylistically and content-wise. It's a small yet sensitive cry against fundamentalism — and hate-mongering fundamentalists — who have no place in a melting-pot society where anyone who raises the cry for racial or communal purity is akin to a modern-day Hitler.

Now that's a lot to say in a world that's dangerously veering towards orthodoxy and fanaticism. But Sooni does it with such delicacy and finesse that you leave the audi with a lightness in your step, a lilt on your lips and a lot of love in your heart, ready to embrace the world in all its diversity. That's the power of this little big film that sees the world through the eyes of a nine-year-old and concludes with his fairy-tale view of angels and fairies winning over demons and devilish godmen.

Young Xerxes (Jahan Bativala) — known as little Zizou — doesn't really like the life he is living. He hates his father, Cyrus Khodaiji (Sohrab Ardeshir), a Parsi fundamentalist who launches a Parsi Liberation Army to preserve the purity of the fast-dwindling community. The motherless kid plays truant from school and prefers to spend the day with Uncle Boman Pressvala (Boman Irani), a crusading journalist and surrogate mom, Aunt Roxanne (Xenobia Shroff), even though their young daughter (Inayah Bativala) hates his presence. The only other bright spots in his life are his elder brother, Art (Imaad Shah), a graphic novelist and Zinedane Zidane, his icon who must come to Mumbai, at least for his sake. He is sure his mother will manoeuvre this from heaven. The film is completely episodic in nature and takes you on a trip with Xerxes as he watches the power of love and tolerance, represented through Boman uncle's little magazine, prevail upon his father's fraud

and fundamentalist movement.

At one level, the film also works as a colourful docu-feature on the alluring lifestyle of the Parsi community. But what stands out are the life-like performances by the ensemble cast — the kids are brilliant — and the gentle comic strain that carries the film forward with a chuckle and a grin. Don't miss it.