

‘Limbo’ is a recipe that mixes serious issues with oddball humor

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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A quirky, understated introduction to immigration

Rating: ««««

out of «««««

Running Time: 103 minutes

This film from Focus Features will be playing at operating cinemas and drive-ins on April 30.

Creating an exceptional comedy or drama that is unapologetically offbeat can be a tricky proposition. That’s true especially when a feature follows a singular and unusual vision which may not appeal to a large demographic. The latest feature to follow the beat of its own drummer is *Limbo*, a British production that mixes serious issues like immigration with deadpan humor and bizarre situations. Admittedly, not every member of the audience will laugh at the oddball situations on display.

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However, the approach generally works and the performances are so strong that the end result feels fresh and engaging.

The story takes place on a remote island off the coast of Scotland that has been chosen as a site for refugees seeking asylum in the UK. Omar (Amir El-Masry) is a musician from war-torn Syria who arrives carrying his oud, a traditional instrument that once belonged to his grandfather. He's welcomed by the bubbly Farhad (Vikash Bhai), a Pakistani man who has been waiting years for his case to be processed. The pair and others hoping to earn citizenship spend long hours watching and discussing the finer points and plotlines of TV shows like *Friends*, attend awkward demonstrations on local customs and culture, and have strange and sometimes tense encounters with residents.

While waiting to find out if they can stay, the men also share their tragic pasts and hopes for the future.

Early sections of the movie are very amusing, particularly as the refugees quietly watch surreally performed reenactments on subjects like sexual harassment. Their deadpan stares are hilarious, as well as the conversations that follow, as well as the comments and questions that arise from what they have witnessed. The film uses a muted sense of humor deftly as it places characters in an odd and cut-off environment and emphasizes just how alien it feels to be in a foreign land. In addition to a couple of enjoyable interactions with some less-than-brainy residents, there is also a funny series of scenes involving Omar visiting a tiny, slimly-stocked grocery with an owner who prefers using a loudspeaker to communicate with shoppers.

Of course, the jokes help viewers relate to the characters and feel their plight as the more dramatic story elements are emphasized. As events progress, the movie makes a deeper impression when the men are forced to deal with bad news, their uncertain futures and the personal trials being endured. The talented but troubled Omar must eventually come to terms with the guilt and frustration he feels for leaving his family behind. These emotions come from the fact that his much-loved sibling has remained in Syria to continue fighting for their home in the civil war and he is further troubled about how to play his music in a new land with an instrument unknown to the residents there.

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Even the upbeat and optimistic Farhad eventually reveals a fear of what could happen to him if his application is rejected.

The movie does a wonderfully subtle job of introducing sweet and relatable characters in an eccentric and amusing way, pulling us in to the issues addressed later in the picture. Despite the film's unorthodox methods and approach, it's a very clever and effective technique. If you can get on its particular wavelength and share its low-key and sometimes surreal sense of humor, then *Limbo* will ultimately impress and make a lasting impact.

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