

Roadside Attractions presents
a GIGANTIC PICTURES
&
NORUZ FILMS production
In association with
LUCKY HAT ENTERTAINMENT
a co-production of
THE INDEPENDENT TELEVISION SERVICE (ITVS)



GOODBYE SOLO

a film by Ramin Bahrani

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For press materials, please visit either www.noruzfilms.com or www.goodbyesolomovie.com

91 minutes

Directed and Edited by	Ramin Bahrani
Written by	Bahareh Azimi Ramin Bahrani
Produced by	Jason Orans Ramin Bahrani
Co-Executive Producer	Stephen Bannatyne
Executive Producers	Brian Devine Brooke Devine
Director of Photography	Michael Simmonds
Production Designer	Chad Keith
Sound Supervisor & Re-Recording Mixer	Tom Efinger
Executive Producer for ITVS	Sally Jo Fifer

For
Sandra Trujillo de Moyano
1974-2008

CAST

Solo	Souléymané Sy Savané
William	Red West
Alex	Diana Franco Galindo
Quiera	Carmen Leyva
Roc	Lane “Roc” Williams
Mamadou	Mamadou

GOODBYE SOLO

Short Synopsis

On the lonely roads of Winston-Salem, North Carolina, two men forge an improbable friendship that will change both of their lives forever. Solo is a Senegalese cab driver working to provide a better life for his young family. William is a tough Southern good ol' boy with a lifetime of regrets. One man's American dream is just beginning, while the other's is quickly winding down. But despite their differences, both men soon realize they need each other more than either is willing to admit. Through this unlikely but unforgettable friendship, GOODBYE SOLO deftly explores the passing of a generation as well as the rapidly changing face of America.

* * *

Long Synopsis

Solo, a Senegalese taxi driver in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, is hired by William, a tough, 70-year-old, white Southerner, to drive him in two weeks time to a nearby mountaintop. Solo soon comes to understand William's plan, and makes one of his own – to befriend the stubborn old man and hopefully change his mind.

Solo starts bringing the reluctant William along on taxi rides. They visit bars, play pool and flirt with women. Solo even introduces William to his smart and independent 9-year-old stepdaughter, with whom William forms an immediate bond. He also meets Solo's strong-willed, and very pregnant, Mexican wife Quiera, who is discouraging of Solo's dream of becoming a flight attendant.

Following a particularly-heated argument with Quiera, Solo moves into William's motel room. Though William tries to keep him at arm's length, Solo eventually wears down his defenses and becomes convinced that he has succeeded in saving the old man.

But William has secrets of his own. When he closes his bank account and gives away the last of his possessions, Solo is crushed and confronts him. William violently throws him out of their motel room. Estranged from his family and now William, Solo has lost everything. That's when he realizes in order to be a true friend he must put his own wishes aside and be there for William in his hour of need.

When the fateful day finally arrives, Solo drives William to the mountaintop, bringing along his stepdaughter whom he sees as his last, best hope of saving William. There on Blowing Rock, high above the luminous autumn foliage, where the wind is powerful enough to blow a man up into the sky, both men learn the beauty and pain of unconditional love.

GOODBYE SOLO
Director's Statement

Solo's kindness towards the stranger he meets, William, is both rare and sorely needed in a world so focused on war, greed, oil and the differences between cultures. Solo's compassion towards this elderly man matches his cultural background as it does my parents' Iranian heritage. But Solo is also a complex man, full of flaws, who comes to learn and change dramatically from his encounter with William. Ultimately Solo must find the courage and strength to love his new friend selflessly in order to help him do something seemingly horrible, or leave him to face it alone. It is a decision and task not easy for any man to face.

Yet I remain steadfast in my belief that by the time these two friends reach the finale, high on a secluded mountaintop with a gusting wind, that even in the face of death they will be able to say goodbye to the solitude of this world.

—Ramin Bahrani, 2008

ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

THE IDEA

The story of GOODBYE SOLO began with director Ramin Bahrani's own encounters with two strangers in the town in which he was born and raised, Winston-Salem, North Carolina: a Senegalese cab driver and an elderly man standing on the side of the road.

Bahrani met a charming young Senegalese taxi driver named "O" (O wishes to remain anonymous) who was working a second job as a gas station clerk. Bahrani notes, "I came to learn that even though O was a cab driver, he did not own his own cab. He would either hire a taxi or walk to get from his home to his job."

The other stranger was one of several elderly men Bahrani would see every day on the side of the road outside an "assisted living" home. Bahrani recalls, "I began to wave at one specific elderly man every time I passed. Soon, he recognized me (or my car) and started happily waving at me, despite the fact that we did not know each other. I confess I was also happy to wave each time, but this man's situation also filled me with a sense of sorrow. Clearly he was lonely and that small connection really meant something to him."

The final element which would hold the story of the film together was the location of the film's climax, Blowing Rock. Located in the world famous Blue Ridge Mountains, Blowing Rock had been a childhood holiday destination for Bahrani and his family.

Blowing Rock was surrounded by legend and myth. Two Native American lovers, forbidden to see one another, would meet there in secret. In despair, the man jumped to his death; yet, the woman he loved prayed to the wind gods, and the man was blown back up into her arms. Aside from this legend, Blowing Rock is also the only place in the world where snow has been recorded to blow upside down and back up into the sky. "I remember throwing sticks off the rock as a child," Bahrani recalls, "and watching, hoping, and willing the wind to blow them back up."

THE STORY

In the winter of 2006/07, Bahrani returned to Winston-Salem and for several months rode the night shift with O, the Senegalese cab driver he had met years before. As the months went by, Bahrani gathered details, observations, sounds, images and ideas which he then shared with his co-writer Bahareh Azimi, who co-wrote CHOP SHOP with Bahrani. "The first thing I wanted to tell Bahareh about was O himself. He was a complex, kind and charming man, whose street past and language, love of reggae music and overall spirit became fused with the fictional character of Solo and the spirit of the film. O had the ability to make everyone who entered his taxi feel good. No matter how mean they might have been to him, they always left his taxi with a smile."

"The idea of the car was very important to me," Azimi remarks. "Who was driving whom? In the end who took who where? Solo begins the film with no control of his own life (or his own car).

His wife, his old drug-dealing friend, his ex-girlfriend and even the dispatcher are all telling him which way he should turn and drive his car, what decisions he should make.”

Of course it was no coincidence that Solo dreams of being a flight attendant, in a plane, up in the sky, which “is connected to the metaphysical power of the wind and the stick at Blowing Rock in the end of the film,” Bahrani says.

These ideas are also connected to the title of the film. Bahrani notes that GOODBYE SOLO not only encourages the viewer to see the film from William’s perspective instead of Solo’s, but that “...it was also about Solo saying goodbye to himself. His encounter with William has decisively changed Solo. The man who stands on Blowing Rock is not the same man who accepted the \$100 from William in the first scene of the film. The title also refers to my hope that in the ending there is enough life and hope that even in the face of death these two friends can say goodbye to solitude.”

Casting and Preparation

Hundreds of actors were auditioned for the role of the taxi driver by Bahrani in New York, Los Angeles, and Paris, and hundreds more were seen via tapes that came in from other American cities – as well as England, France and various African countries.

Ultimately, Bahrani decided to go with an unknown for the lead role – Souléymane Sy Savané, of Senegalese and Ivory Coast descent. Souléymane, nicknamed "Solo," had an easy charm and striking face, and Bahrani could not believe it when Solo told him that he had been a flight attendant for several years with Air Afrique!

Solo also shared many of his character’s traits and beliefs, which helped him better understand his relationship with William. “In my country, there is an old saying: *an elder that dies is like a library that burns*,” Solo said. “When I moved to America I was always shocked by Western culture’s lack of interest in the elderly. In Africa, we would never abandon an elder like William, stranger or not.”

An equally comprehensive search was conducted for William and it led to Bahrani finding Red West, a stunt man and actor out of Memphis, who has appeared in numerous Hollywood films including ROAD HOUSE and THE RAINMAKER. West is perhaps best known for his decades-long association with Elvis Presley as his bodyguard in the famed Memphis Mafia, and as one of Elvis’s closest childhood friends.

Bahrani remembers watching West’s casting tape. “I saw his face and heard his voice for no more than five seconds before jumping out of my seat and yelling ‘That’s William!’ In fact, he was so much William to me that I never called him by his real name. During production I honestly could not remember his real name!”

After seeing Bahrani’s two previous films, West noted, “I was impressed. The performances of his nonprofessional leads were amazing; I couldn’t believe those people had never acted and so I

put my trust in him.” West adds, “. . . and I loved the script. When I learned what William was writing in his notebook (about Solo), it humanized the character for me, and I knew I absolutely wanted this role.”

“Everything that William was not going to say in this film was there in his face, and in his walk, and the way he smoked; it was even in the real-life past of West,” Bahrani said. “His Elvis Rock and Roll days were all done; a faded memory. You could sense a struggle for purpose and meaning in the future, but what else was there? Who else was left? This just seemed so palpable on West’s face that I knew nobody could question it.”

As the cast and locations came together, Bahrani wanted to immediately immerse Solo in his role by bringing him to North Carolina to drive a Willard’s Cab. But Solo had been hiding something from Bahrani: he had no driver’s license.

“It took me four times to get my license,” Solo confesses. But he finally did and arrived in Winston-Salem to live with Bahrani and his brother for three months in advance of principal photography.

Bahrani informed Solo that to support his stay, he would have to work as a cab driver at Willard’s. Solo was quickly on the road learning the streets and the business from various cab drivers who served as his guides. “I had to make enough money to rent the cab, pay my guide, and even for my meals!” Solo exclaims. “But it was the best way to prepare for the part.”

Fortunately, if Solo fell short on cash, he would come home to find that Bahrani’s mother had brought piles of Iranian food. “Like on a Cassavetes film, Solo and my preproduction team would all sit down together and eat dinner,” Bahrani recalls fondly.

And what about O? “I was able to meet him on only a handful of occasions, and I took a lot from those moments,” Solo recalls. “I was able to understand some of the street language in the script and also the attitude that Ramin had talked to me about for so many months.”

Producer Jason Orans notes, “In American independent cinema Ramin is unique in his lengthy, dedicated and very specific approach to casting, locations and rehearsals. It really pays off and you can feel it in his films.”

A week before production West arrived in Winston-Salem for rehearsal expecting table-readings of the script. But Bahrani immediately began rehearsing with basic blocking and DP Michael Simmonds operating a handi-cam. “A film is not a novel to be read at a table; it is to be acted and blocked out in scenes with a camera,” Bahrani says. “Red came very prepared and gave me even more than what I wanted.”

West admits, “Bahrani’s rehearsal style helped immensely because during production we were so prepared that we didn’t have to think anymore. We could just act and react.”

Production

Principal photography for GOODBYE SOLO began on September 19, 2007 and wrapped after 30 shooting days on October 22nd. These dates were planned so that the scenes at Blowing Rock could be filmed during prime leaf-changing season. In fact the final scenes were actually shot on and around October 20th.

One of the biggest production challenges was shooting and lighting the night scenes in a moving cab, which were shot over one week on a process trailer. Bahrani and cinematographer Michael Simmonds began their work by planning out how to shoot all the scenes between Solo and William in the taxi. Would it be in one continuous two-shot, like the opening scene, or told with cuts, from behind their heads, or in the rear-view mirror?

“From the script stage, Azimi and I had planned out a visual game of when William is in the back seat, when he moves to the front, and even the one time when Solo is in the back seat,” Bahrani says. “And then with Michael’s help we reinforced their relationship with the camera.” Simmonds adds, “Ramin and I talked about the dirty-two-shot, to visually connect the two men in profile when they’re both in the front seat studying or drinking beers. But ultimately we maintained that it’s best to stay simple and classical and let the story, and the two men’s striking faces unfold honestly before the camera without tricks.”

For the rest of the locations Bahrani remarks that “the basic concern was to erase the presence of the director and the camera so that the world we were portraying seemed as realistic as possible. That you would believe these men and their friendship really existed and that it was not a film.” Simmonds notes, “It’s a way of cinematically trying to redefine simplicity.”

The only scene that they knew would not be shot on a tripod was the final scene of Solo on Blowing Rock. Bahrani says, “Michael and I decided on hand-held after I showed him photos I had taken on the rock.” Simmonds laughs, “I remember someone from production asked if we wanted a crane that day! What the hell would we do with a crane?!”

The two also discussed how wide open the landscapes would be in the end, especially on the rock, as opposed to how dark and cramped Solo’s taxi is. “Even when Solo watches the airplane taking off early in the film it is from inside his taxi,” Bahrani remarks.

Solo was especially eager to work on the scenes surrounding his fight with Mamadou. “Of course I wanted to do my action scene!” Solo says with a smile. “But the moment where I decide not to talk with William’s grandson at the cinema seemed really big to me. My character had changed so much. Can you imagine the chill Solo of the beginning driving around looking for Mamadou and then getting into a physical fight with him? And all of this to do the opposite of my goal – to help take William to that rock instead of to stop him.”

West comments that the hardest scene for him was the unspoken “goodbye” with Solo and Alex at the footpath that leads to Blowing Rock. “It made me realize how much time my character had squandered with his grandson,” recalls West. “But that death was one of the few things I was still

in control of. It meant final relief from the indignities of old age, from the looming inevitability of a nursing home scenario and freedom from the ever-present reminder of personal failure... I prayed that God would have mercy on my soul.”

Bahrani was very impressed by West in that scene, which the director considers one of the most emotional scenes of his three films to date. “The scene tore Red up, and it shows on screen. It’s very powerful.” But in general Bahrani did not often compliment West during the shoot. He even instructed the crew to speak to West as little as possible. “I wanted to keep him alone, isolated and in character.” Bahrani adds. “Sometimes I would frustrate him right before scenes where he was to get angry at Solo.”

Once the autumn leaves had changed colors, the crew moved to Blowing Rock to film the climax. “The final shot of the film is so exquisitely beautiful,” producer Orans muses, “that I can imagine Ramin drove every inch of the 469-mile Blue Ridge Parkway and climbed up every single rock and cliff to find just the right vantage point for his camera.”

“The cinematic language of the final moments on the rock with Solo are important to me,” Bahrani states. “I tried to capture a very intense emotion and a complex philosophy about the world, god, life and death, through basic elements and cuts: Solo’s face, his hand holding a wooden stick above the clouds and trees, and the gusting sound of wind. No dialogue. No music. No sentiment. This scene can’t be a novel, a song, or theatre. It can only be expressed this way through cinema.”

CAST

SOULÉYMANE SY SAVANÉ (Solo)

Born in the Ivory Coast to a Senegalese mother and a Mandingo father, Souléymané grew up in both Paris and West Africa’s Abidjan. In the mid-nineties Souléymané won an African modeling contest, and he soon became a regular face at Paris Fashion Week, working with such notables as Jean-Paul Gaultier, Dries Van Noten and Kenzo. In 2006, Souléymané was cast as a recurring character on the world’s first African TV drama produced in the States, “Yama Afrika.” Souléymané was also a flight attendant for many years with Air Afrique. *GOODBYE SOLO* is his feature film acting debut.

RED WEST (William)

Born in 1936 in Memphis, Tennessee, Red West is known around the world as a close friend of Elvis Presley and a member of the fabled Memphis Mafia. He served as Presley’s bodyguard and constant companion throughout the many phases of Presley’s career, from the humble beginnings through the tragic end. While working with Presley, West became a movie stuntman and actor and appeared in 16 classic Elvis movies. Since the 60’s, West has appeared in supporting major roles for Francis Ford Coppola, Robert Altman and Oliver Stone and has appeared in many other films, from big budget studio fare such as *GLORY ROAD* and *ROAD HOUSE*, to independent gems like Ira Sachs’ Sundance award-winning *FORTY SHADES OF BLUE*. He has also appeared in recurring roles on numerous TV series including “The Riches” and “Wild Wild West.”

West is also an accomplished songwriter whose work has been recorded by the legendary singers Pat Boone, Ricky Nelson, Johnny Rivers, and many others. His two classics are “Separate Ways” and “Why Can’t Every Day be Like Christmas?,” both of which were made into immortal recordings by Elvis Presley. GOODBYE SOLO is West’s first leading role.

FILMMAKERS

RAMIN BAHRANI – Writer/Director/Producer

Born and raised in the U.S. in 1975, Ramin Bahrani received his BA from Columbia University in New York City before moving to his parents’ homeland of Iran for three years where he made his student thesis film, STRANGERS (2000). Bahrani then spent some time in Paris before returning to the States to begin work on his first feature film, MAN PUSH CART (2005), which premiered in the Venice Days section of the Venice Film Festival (2005) and then screened at Sundance (2006). The film won more than ten international prizes, was released theatrically around the world, and was nominated for three Independent Spirit Awards.

Bahrani’s second film, CHOP SHOP (2007), was produced by Lisa Muskat (GEORGE WASHINGTON) and Big Beach Films (LITTLE MISS SUNSHINE) and premiered in Director’s Fortnight at the 2007 Cannes Film Festival (2007). CHOP SHOP then screened at Toronto (2007) and Berlin (2008) before being released theatrically to wide critical acclaim.

In 2008 Bahrani was awarded the prestigious “Someone to Watch” Independent Spirit Award. He was also recently nominated for this year’s Spirit Award for Best Director for his work on CHOP SHOP. GOODBYE SOLO is his third feature film.

JASON ORANS – Producer

New York City-based independent producer Jason Orans is nominated for the 2009 IFP Independent Spirit Producer Award for his work on GOODBYE SOLO and for the feature YEAR OF THE FISH (Sundance 2007).

Orans' new feature is DARE, starring Emmy Rossum and Alan Cumming, which will premiere in Dramatic Competition at Sundance 2009. Orans co-founded Gigantic Pictures with producing partner Brian Devine, and together they’ve produced GOODBYE BABY (Slamdance 2007); FLANNEL PAJAMAS (Sundance Dramatic Competition 2006); SATELLITE (Tribeca 2005) as well as the several movies for PBS including COSMOPOLITAN, THE SUITOR and THE FIRST SEVEN YEARS.

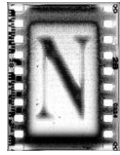
BAHAREH AZIMI – Screenwriter

Born in Iran, but raised and living in France since the age of three, Bahareh Azimi holds a degree as a water engineer and is also an architect and interior designer. Azimi has worked for several years in one of the leading and most innovative architecture firms in Nice. She has also written songs for several French independent musicians. GOODBYE SOLO is her follow-up collaboration with Ramin Bahrani after co-writing CHOP SHOP with him.

MICHAEL SIMMONDS – Director of Photography

After graduating from New York City’s School of Visual Arts, Michael Simmonds shot two films for Amir Naderi, one of the most influential figures in Iranian cinema: *MARATHON* (Tribeca 2002) and *SOUND BARRIER* (Tribeca 2005). Simmonds’ other recent work as a cinematographer includes *TRAINWRECK: MY LIFE AS AN IDIOT* (Gretchen Mol, Sean William Scott) as well as the highly praised documentary *THE ORDER OF MYTHS* (Sundance 2008).

Simmonds was recently nominated for the 2009 Independent Spirit Award for Best Cinematography for his work on Bahrani’s *CHOP SHOP*. He was previously nominated for the same honor for his work on *MAN PUSH CART*.



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