

The Salesman [12] 2016|Iran/France|124 min

UK release date **17th March 2017**

Director **Asghar Farhadi**

Screenplay **Asghar Farhadi**

Cinematography **Hossein Jafarian**

Cast **Taraneh Alidoosti** (Rana Etesami); **Shahb Hosseini** (Emad Etesami); **Babak Karimi** (Babak)

Like his earlier film *Fireworks Wednesday* (2006), *The Salesman* has the same idea of a living space being disrupted, and the resulting intimate discomfort and upheaval causing a good deal to be revealed about the relationships of the people who live there.

This story is about a happy middle-class couple in Tehran: Rana and Emad, played by Taraneh Alidoosti and Shahab Hosseini. He is a teacher and she stays at home, and there are some thoughts about starting a family. But more than this, they are talented members of a semi-professional theatre group, and putting on a production of Arthur Miller's *Death Of A Salesman*, with Emad playing the failed salesman Willy Loman and Emad playing Willy's wife Linda. Just as the run starts, they are forced to move out of their apartment because the whole building appears to be collapsing due to construction faults — Farhadi creates a very disturbing scene in which cracks snap across window panes. An imminent Titanic catastrophe.

The couple eventually find an alternative apartment, set up for them as a favour by a fellow cast member. But they only find out too late this flat was once inhabited by a young woman who appeared to work as a prostitute, and unsavoury people have got used to calling round at all hours of the night. Rana one night buzzes open the outer door thinking that it must be her husband. But it isn't.

There is a formal pleasure and fascination in the way Farhadi juxtaposes the grim, complex scenes of the couple's real life with the scenes from Arthur Miller's play, with its formal demonstrations of emotion. Messy realism and

classically proportioned tragedy are set down, side by side. Emad himself is a restrained, cerebral guy, but it could well be that starring in Miller has given him a conceited, dramatic, morally heroic view of himself. Willy Loman wondered in anguish what sort of a man can't give his wife and family the good things in life. Emad is wondering what sort of man can't protect his wife from assault. Cleverly, Farhadi allows his audience to make assumptions as to where the Willy Loman parallel lies, and then upends them in the film's final minutes — yet in such a way that the new connection is a little glib.

It's a smart, ambitious film, but very plot-dependent on one of Emad's pupils having a father who works in the motor vehicle licensing department. The Salesman is trying harder for a bigger effect and bigger payoff than his previous films, and it doesn't have the enigmatic quality of *A Separation*.

Having said all this, the sheer IQ of Farhadi's film-making makes this very watchable; only a film-maker of his confidence could have found space for an audacious bit of comedy: exhausted in class, Emad falls asleep and the kids pose for cheeky selfies around his snoring face. The Salesman is a well-crafted, valuable drama.

After: Peter Bradshaw, The Guardian, May 2016

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