

The Big Sick [15] 2017|USA|120 min

UK release date	28th July 2017
Director	Michael Showalter
Screenplay	Emily V Gordon, Kumail Nanjiani
Cinematographer	Brian Burgoyne
Cast	Kumail Nanjiani (Kumail); Zoe Kazan (Emily); Holly Hunter (Beth); Ray Romano (Terry); Anupam Kher (Azmat); Zenobia Shroff (Sharmeen)

The Big Sick takes its wry, gentle tone from its lead character, Kumail (Kumail Nanjiani). He's a sweet-natured, Pakistani-American, Chicago-based stand-up comedian and Uber driver who has an incredibly complicated private life and is struggling to overcome the great divide between his Muslim background and the secular world in which he has landed.

The film is cowritten by Nanjiani and his wife, Emily V Gordon, and is closely based on the story of their own courtship. They first encountered one another when she heckled him at a stand-up gig. In the film, Kumail and Emily (Zoe Kazan) have a brief fling with no notion that it will lead to anything serious. He's a struggling comedian who performs sets at a tiny club alongside his friends and fellow comedians. She's a graduate student specialising in psychology.

Some of the best scenes in the film, which could easily belong in a sitcom, involve Kumail's regular visits to his family. His parents, strict Muslims, dote on him but expect him to marry a wife of their choosing and to become a doctor or lawyer. Everything about Kumail exasperates the other family members. He doesn't pray enough. He hasn't grown a beard. He doesn't pay attention to the prospective Pakistani brides his mother serves up at every family dinner, almost as if they're part of the menu.

Early on, The Big Sick seems to be shaping up as a conventional romcom. Emily and Kumail tease one another and hang out – but both are convinced this is only a short-term relationship. He's not prepared to give up his family and

knows he'll be disowned if he doesn't marry a Pakistani girl. She has her own reasons for shying away from long-term commitment. So far, so predictable. Then, the film veers away from convention by throwing in the "big sick", a life-threatening illness.

In its own delicate way, it is exposing the everyday racism that Muslims experience in America. Some of its best jokes involve Kumail responding when he is goaded about 9/11 or accused of being a member of ISIS. The humour, though, comes tinged with frustration and even despair at the attitudes it exposes.

The filmmakers also extract maximum comic value from Kumail's extremely awkward relationship with Emily's parents, Beth (Holly Hunter) and Terry (Ray Romano), who come into Chicago from out of town. In a cast full of comedians, Holly Hunter stands out for her sheer energy and abrasiveness. She terrifies both medical staff and hecklers in the comedy club with her outspoken candour, spitfire-like delivery and refusal to shy away from a row.

Kumail isn't an alpha male. His jokes don't always work. His apartment is a mess. He's a very low key, self-deprecating type of movie hero but one with a winning perspective on life. His offbeat point of view is what captures Emily and it's likely to win over even the most sceptical audiences too.

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