

## SA film *Barakat* in the running for an Oscar

Award-winning South African Muslim film, *Barakat*, has been selected as South Africa's official submission for the 94th Annual Academy Awards, the National Film and Video Foundation confirmed on Monday. The local film is shot entirely in Afrikaans.



Source: Supplied

Directed by Amy Jephta and produced by Ephraim Gordon, co-founders of production companies PaperJet Films and Nagvlug Films, *Barakat* was released in cinemas in early 2021.

'Barakat' is an Arabic word denoting blessings, abundance and prosperity. The film follows the trials and tribulations of Aisha Davids (played by veteran actress Vinette Ebrahim), a widow who has to preserve the peace between four sons struggling to come to terms with the death of their father two years after the fact.

Her sons, Zunaid (Joey Rasdien), Zaid (Mortimer Williams), Yaseen (Keeno Lee Hector) and Nur (Danny Ross) return to their family home to celebrate Eid-ul-Fitr, the celebration marking the end of the month-long dawn-to-sunset fasting of Ramadan. They've never dealt with their father's death or the void his passing has left and each son's unprocessed pain manifests in constant familial conflict, saddening their mother as she tries to move on with her own life.

The cast also includes Sافت winners Quanita Adams (*Forgiveness*) and June van Merch (*Sara se Geheim*) as well as Sافت nominees Bonnie Mbuli (*Noughts & Crosses*, *Catch a Fire*) and Leslie Fong (*Isidingo*).

The touching film, which closed Film Africa 2020, has won seven international awards so far, including Best International Feature at the 2021 Idyllwild International Festival of Cinema and Best Narrative Feature at both the Motion Pictures International Film Festival and The Reel Sisters Of The Diaspora Festival in 2020.

## Recognising SA talent

The screenplay is by writing-producing team Amy Jephta and Ephraim Gordon who made their debut at South Africa's 2017 KykNet Silwerskerm Festival with their short film *Soldaat* (*Soldier*), for which they won Best Screenplay and Best Short.

Jephta, a celebrated theatre practitioner, director and writer, also scripted South Africa's official 2018 Golden Globes submission for Foreign Film, *Ellen: The Story of Ellen Pakkies*. In 2019, she was also awarded the Standard Bank Young Artist of the Year Award for theatre.

"I am so proud that this film has reached as many people as it has, and to be recognised by South Africa in this way is incredibly special," said Jephta. "Even after an extremely challenging year for our film industry, we're honoured that a small story about a family has connected us."



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Gordon added: "This was totally unexpected, but it shows that everyone's hard work on this project has paid off. This film was a blessing from the beginning and continues to be. It is our barakat."

Nominations for the 94th Academy Awards will be announced on 8 February 2022, with the Oscars ceremony taking place on Sunday, 27 March 2022. South Africa won the Foreign Language Film category in 2005 for Gavin Hood's *Tsotsi*, after being nominated in 2004 for Darrell Roodt's *Yesterday*. Oliver Schmitz's *Life, Above All* was shortlisted in 2010, as was John Trengrove's *The Wound* in 2017.

*Barakat* was developed in partnership with M-Net and funded in association with the NFVF, the Department of Trade Industry and Competition, Industrial Development Corporation as well as Indigenous Film Distribution, the South African distributor of the film.

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