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MOVIES

# 'Trijya — Radius': Film Review | Shanghai 2019

5:07 AM PDT 7/1/2019 by Deborah Young



Courtesy of Bombay Berlin

**THE BOTTOM LINE**

*A mood piece for the young.*



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## A young Indian poet embarks on a journey of self-discovery in Akshay Indikar's first feature.

A young poet seeks the still point in a turning world in Akshay Indikar's Marathi-language film *Trijya — Radius*, an unusually sensitive and well-made coming-of-age drama that should connect particularly with questioning under-30s. The German-Indian coprod, which premiered in Shanghai's Asian New Talent Award competition, brings a sophisticated point of view as well as a sad aching to the hero's search for answers to the perennial questions about life's purpose. One can feel how personal a film it is to the 27-year-old director.

Time is a central theme, like Avdhut's (Abhay Mahajan) resistance to being forced to follow it slavishly, and a corollary is that the pace is meditative and slow-moving. We meet Avdhut, a good-looking boy in a beard and a clean shirt, at the newspaper where he occasionally works. He is helping a colleague compose the daily astrology column, tossing out pregnant two-liners like "Pisces. Who says you exist? Doubt your existence." Funny business, it gives a quick glimpse into his unfettered imagination and ironical view of conventions.

Though his editor calls on him to write tabloid-selling shaggy dog stories, the boy is a poet and, judging by the lines he recites in the film, not an ordinary one. Even though he doesn't have a steady income, he's under pressure from his family to "get married and settle down." It's hard to imagine this free spirit starting a life with the silent girl in a sari who comes round to his house with her parents to get acquainted. Instead, a casual bookstore encounter with a young woman he used to know (Aarya Rothe) ends in the brief shot of a rumpled bed, more in keeping with his character.

His family has moved to Pune from their native village and seem on the edge of poverty. In a poignant scene, Avdhut connects with an old schoolmate from the village, who is grasping at straws to find a job and a future for himself. Their evening together is half-carefree, half-wistful and melancholy.

When he is in his depressed loner mood, Avdhut seems a little out of it. He is constantly taking trains and watching the fast-moving scenery zip past. One time, he is riding a train without a destination or a ticket and is caught by the conductor. When posed the age-old questions, "Where did you come from, and where are you



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Indian society.

While excellent at subtly creating atmosphere, the film has little forward narrative movement and the second half drags through more shots of Avdhut moodily walking around, smoking and staring out of train windows. He also spends a lot of time by himself in nature in sections with names like "Roots" and "Tree." Mahajan is well-cast in the leading role for this kind of doubtful wandering, but can't hold the film together all by himself. In general, the cast is sensitively chosen and delicately used, with Marathi star Girish Kulkarni making a cameo.

The cinematography by Indikar and Swapnil Shete stands out strongly, frequently taking the place of dialogue and giving the film its lyrical credentials: Avdhut's face against a waterfall, his figure dwarfed by a lonely road through the hills, mists rising on a vaporous lake like a dream or delirium. The use of color/no color is carefully controlled, with the camera putting a pink hot spot in a dull village scene or adding and subtracting color as it racks focus. Mandar Kamlapurkar's exceptional sound design creates an emotionally rich soundtrack able to contribute an almost mystical dimension, without wandering off into religious territory.

*Production companies: Chitrakathi Nirmiti, Bombay Berlin Film Production*

*Cast: Abhay Mahajan, Prashant Gite, Aarya Rothe, Girish Kulkarni, Shirkant Yadav, Nandini Pakhre, Makrand Saptarshi, Adwaita Jadhav, Somnath Limbarkar, Varsha Malwadkar, Gajanan Pranjpe*

*Director: Akshay Indikar*

*Screenwriters: Akshay Indikar, Kshama Padalkar*

*Producers: Arvind Pakhle, Katharina Suckale, Arfi Lamba*

*Executive producer: Tejashri Kamble*

*Directors of photography: Swapnil Shete, Akshay Indikar*

*Production and costume designer: Tejashri Kamble*

*Editor: Akshay Indikar*

*Sound designer: Mardar Kamlapurkar*

*Casting directors: Tejashri Kamble, Akshay Indikar*

*Venue: Shanghai International Film Festival (Asian New Talent Award)*

91 minutes

## MOVIES

# 'The Call of the Wild': Film Review

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12:00 PM PST 2/17/2020 by Frank Scheck

**THE BOTTOM LINE***What, no real dogs were available?* OPENS  
2/21/2020

## Harrison Ford and a CGI-generated dog star in the latest screen adaptation of Jack London's classic 1903 adventure novel.

There have been movie adaptations of Jack London's classic 1903 novel *The Call of the Wild* dating as far back as a silent 1923 version. Cinematic treatments continued in the 1930s with an adaptation starring Clark Gable and Loretta Young, and subsequent versions had lead actors that included Charlton Heston and Rutger Hauer. All of these films had at least one thing in common: They starred a real damn dog.

Such, unfortunately, is not the case with the latest version, starring Harrison Ford as the good-hearted prospector John Thornton, who forms a bond during the Yukon Gold Rush with a St. Bernard/Scotch Collie canine named Buck. In a blow to animal employment in the acting profession, Buck, who boasts the vast



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photorealistic animated films as *The Jungle Book* and *The Lion King*. It's not surprising that the film marks the live-action debut of director Chris Sanders, whose previous credits include *Lilo & Stitch*, *How to Train Your Dragon* and *The Croods*.

The results are visually disorienting, to say the least. Although Notary and the special effects team do as good a job as technology allows, the expressive Buck never quite looks real. And you keep expecting him and the rest of the animals to burst into song.

On the other hand, it might have been a reasonable approach, since this version scripted by Michael Green takes considerable liberties with the source material and significantly ups the danger and spectacle. The Buck in this film isn't just a fearless, stout-hearted dog; he also engages in a daring underwater rescue in a frozen river and even outruns an avalanche. Apparently, the creators felt that London's tale wasn't exciting enough, although it has been delighting readers for more than a century.

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None of this may matter to the young audiences to whom the pic is obviously aimed. But more discerning viewers will wince at how everything has been exaggerated to comic proportions, both intentional and not. In the early scenes depicting Buck's spoiled life in the household of a prosperous family headed by Judge Miller (Bradley Whitford, in little more than a cameo), he wreaks the sort of slapstick havoc that would have caused Beethoven to hang his head in shame.

A significant plot element involves Buck falling under the temporary ownership of the siblings Hal (Dan Stevens) and Mercedes (Karen Gillan), the former foolishly insisting that Buck lead a pack of dogs over a frozen river despite the fact that the ice is melting. In the original novel, they, along with Mercedes' husband Charles (Colin Woodell), wind up drowning. Here, Hal is transformed into a snarling villain who bedevils Buck and Thornton to the very end, with the normally reliable Stevens encouraged to deliver the sort of moustache-twirling Snidely Whiplash turn that makes Hal seem like an animated character himself.

Fortunately, Ford, sporting a burly white beard, is on hand to lend some nuance to the proceedings. The veteran actor delivers a sensitive turn as the kindly Thornton, who still grieves the death of his son and subsequent split from his wife and nurses his sorrow with alcohol. (Unable to resist any anthropomorphism, the film has Buck repeatedly trying to take away Thornton's booze, like a canine AA sponsor.) Seeming more invested onscreen than he's been in a while, Ford infuses his typically understated performance with a moving emotional depth that's the best thing in the film, although the fact that he narrates the story as well (from Buck's perspective, no less) is more reflective of his star power than storytelling logic.



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played by Omar Sy and Cara Gee. And the final sequences, depicting Buck's inevitably succumbing to the call of the wild and bonding with a pack of timber wolves, are moving, even if the animals are CGI-created.

Still, you can't avoid the feeling that Lassie and Rin Tin Tin are rolling over in their graves.

*Production companies: 20th Century Studios, TSG Entertainment, 3 Arts Entertainment*

*Distributor: 20th Century Studios*

*Cast: Harrison Ford, Omar Sy, Dan Stevens, Karen Gillan, Bradley Whitford, Cara Gee, Michael Horse, Jean Louisa Kelly, Colin Woodell, Adam Fergus, Abraham Benrubi, Terry Notary*

*Director: Chris Sanders*

*Screenwriter: Michael Green*

*Producers: Erwin Stoff, James Mangold*

*Executive producers: Diana Pokorny, Ryan Stafford, Michael Green*

*Director of photography: Janusz Kaminski*

*Production designer: Stefan Dechant*

*Editors: William Hoy, David Heinz*

*Composer: John Powell*

*Costume designer: Kate Hawley*

*Casting: Denise Chamian*

*Rated PG, 100 minutes*

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