

British Actor/Musician Riz Ahmed Wins His First Academy Award For Short Film ‘The Long Goodbye’

By: Tory Darting, AMT Reporter

The actor has become a leading voice in promoting diversity and more accurate representations of Muslims in film



Riz Ahmed, who has frequently spoken out against anti-Islamic narratives in Hollywood, has become the first Muslim to win an Academy Award in the Live Action Short Film category.

In his acceptance speech during the 94th Academy Awards, Ahmed explained that “The Long Goodbye,” a dystopian film about a South Asian family in London who deals with a “far-right, aggressive,” militia, actually symbolizes a message of hope.

“In such divided times, we believe that the role of the story is to remind us there is no ‘us’ and ‘them,’” he said. “There’s just ‘us.’ This is for everyone who feels like they don’t belong. Anyone who feels like they’re stuck in no man’s land. You’re not alone. We’ll meet you there. That’s where the future is.”



Pictured: Aniel Karia (left) and Ahmed / Getty Images

Ahmed and director Aniel Karia co-wrote the award-winning film in which Ahmed also stars. The film was named after Ahmed’s 2021 album and he says it reflects his identity as a British Pakistani artist.

The film can be watched [here](#).



Pictured: Fawzia Mirza

Writer of award-winning short film “Noor and Layla,” Pakistani-Canadian-American director Fawzia Mirza paid tribute to Ahmed’s achievement. Mirza, who is also known for her contribution to CBS series “The Red Line,” where she wrote about the first queer Muslim romance on network TV, said Muslims need “visibility” in the industry and platforms at the highest level.

“Riz Ahmed’s historic win is another step towards that,” she said. “The Long Goodbye was so intense, it brought me to tears. His win is a testament to the importance and power of authentically telling our stories and using art to impact others as well as process our own emotions and experiences.”

The words expressed by Mirza, who worked on Amazon Prime’s film “Signature Move,” which was screened at over 150 film festivals and won 15 awards, mirror Ahmed’s own stated views.

“Having more Muslim storytellers tell their stories, having more nuanced, messy, humanized three-dimensional portrayals of Muslims is absolutely crucial and key, and we need to have that, but it all comes to nothing if we carry on churning out these really toxic and frankly racist and outdated portrayals as well,” he said.

Ahmed made waves at last year’s Oscars for his acclaimed performance in Amazon Prime’s award-winning film “Sound of Metal,” where he played a heavy metal drummer who is losing his hearing. He was nominated for Best Actor and the film was nominated for Best Picture.



Pictured: Ahmed in “Sound of Metal”

The British artist is also gaining recognition for promoting diversity in the film industry and in 2019 founded Left Handed Films. As a self-proclaimed “lefty,” the name represents “being an outlier and perhaps doing things differently.”

Through his company, he is opening the door for more Muslim creatives to earn a place in Hollywood.



Ahmed, who attended this year's ceremony with his American wife, writer Fatima Farheen Mirza, graduated from Oxford University in 2003 with a degree in Philosophy, Politics and Economics and landed his first role in "The Road to Guantanamo" in 2006. He says studies show Muslims make up less than 2% of

speaking parts across 200 popular films made in the West, despite constituting over 24% of the global population.

“The cost of this lack of representation is measured in lost potential in terms of storytellers and artists in their careers and what they can contribute, lost audiences in terms of people switching off, and over a billion Muslims around the world who don’t get to connect to these stories,” he said. “This failure of representation is experienced by Muslims as pain, physical pain, in terms of being attacked, in terms of countries being invaded, in terms of discriminatory legislation.”

Mirza agreed with Ahmed, emphasizing the importance of Muslims banding together to overcome the obstacles in Hollywood.

“Hollywood loves when we are singular or bifurcated,” they said. “Now is the time for us Muslims to come together to build community and help each other, to be in collaboration, not competition, to help our voice, inshallah, get louder and stand prouder year after year after year.”

Ahmed has admitted to feeling frustrated by the “two-dimensional portrayals” of Muslims and said he hoped one day to be able to focus on just being an artist.

“I don’t really want to be here now,” he said. “I don’t want to be here giving these speeches... I want to be able to do what my white counterparts do. I want to be able to take a role, give interviews about the role and then in between roles, prepare for the next role.”