

Diana Franco Galindo and
Souléymané Sy Savané in
Goodbye Solo



Expectations Fail

Complex characters deal with messy real life

GOODBYE SOLO: Directed and edited by Ramin Bahrani. Written by Bahrani and Bahareh Azimi. Cinematography, Michael Simmonds. Starring, Souléymané Sy Savané, Red West and Diana Franco Galindo. Roadside Attractions, 2009. R. 91 minutes. ★★★★★

In Winston-Salem, N.C., a man gets into a cab and asks the driver if, in a few days' time, he will take him to the top of a nearby mountain. There's a decent chunk of money in it. It's a simple request, but Solo (Souléymané Sy Savané) can't leave it alone. Why does William (Red West) want to go there? Solo, gregarious and talkative, peppers the terse older man with questions; William, withdrawn and worn, brushes him off, until Solo, joking, asks the right question, and just for a

moment, silence fills the cab.

Goodbye Solo, like director Ramin Bahrani's previous film, *Chop Shop*, is a story of changing and continuing in the wake of failure, and a story about a connection that can only go so far. Solo, chatty and earnest, is the kind of person who finds a way to click with everyone he talks to in a day; if the first try doesn't work, he'll just keep talking until something does. When William's gruffness is so harsh that Solo has no response, the cab driver's face stills just long enough for him to consider and assess the conversation — then he's off on a new tack. When Solo, interviewing for the flight attendant job he dreams of, says he likes to talk to new people, he's really not kidding.

But William doesn't want to talk.

William doesn't even want Solo driving him around, not once he realizes that the younger man is determined to steer William away from his decision. Stubbornly, Solo tugs William into his world, which is a mess in its own way: Solo's pregnant wife, Quiera (Carmen Leyva), wants him on the ground to help with their child, not flying off as a flight attendant. Her young daughter, Alex (Diana Franco Galindo), is a serious, smart child who provides a bridge between the adults' conflicting desires: Nobody wants to mess things up for her. When Solo winds up sleeping on the tiny sofa of William's motel room, the visiting Alex becomes a connection again: William, reluctant as he is to say much at all, seems more comfortable with the girl who doesn't expect anything of him.

Goodbye Solo builds so quietly and subtly that it's disconcerting to realize, as it reaches its end, how involving, how affecting the film is. Bahrani's hometown of Winston-Salem hovers in the background, its place in the South a quiet character of its own; the precarious tempo of Solo's life — one focused on a dream of flight but grounded in the demands of work, family, friends — thrums with familiarity. But so does what we see of William's existence, with its dragging weight of loneliness. Though William's mind can't be changed, his life has been — and so has Solo's. In the end, Bahrani's film is full of hope and change, even as neither of those things take their expected forms. **EW**

Goodbye Solo opens Friday, May 29, at the Bijou.



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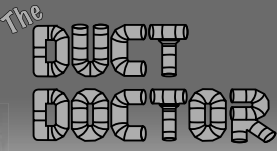
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