



By **Omer Tariq**

Earlier this year at the Southbank Centre, in front of a mostly Jewish audience, David Baddiel had talked about the reasons for writing his new movie, *The Infidel*.

Baddiel – who is of Jewish origin but was beaten up as a teenager for being mistaken for a ‘Pa\*\*’ – had been invited along with Tariq Ali to discuss religion, politics and identity as part of Southbank Centre’s Jewish Book Week.

He explained that the similarities between Muslims and Jews and the stereotyping of Muslims in the mainstream media had made him write a script that both Muslims and ‘infidels’ could laugh at, and with, each other.

The tone for *The Infidel* is set in its first few moments. Leyton resident Mahmud Nazir (Omid Djalili) would rather watch ’80s pop than news coverage of yet another bigoted cleric. Mahmud is a family man – though maybe a little too open with his son – and a Spurs supporter who is anything but the stereotypical jihadi next door.

But soon he finds himself thrown into a midlife identity crisis after discovering he was adopted, and was actually born to Jewish parents. To qualify to meet his ‘real’ father, who lies ailing in a Jewish nursing home, he needs to go on a crash course on being Jewish. He finds a willing teacher in Lenny Goldberg (Richard Schiff), who drives a black cab and is (eventually) happy to share his knowledge with Mahmud.

As a self-exiled American, Lenny provides interesting insights during Mahmud's voyage of discovery. Mahmud's antagonism towards jihadi "nutters" is matched by Lenny's views on the Jewishness of Israeli Jews, who according to him do not have the angst that he feels is central to being Jewish.



Baddiel's observations on the similarities between Jews and Muslims is well-reflected by Djalili, who looks as convincing in a kippah as in a kurta. It is also refreshing to see a liberal imam grace the cinema screen. Other aptly portrayed everyday Asian characters include Mahmud's Pakistani workmates who run a minicab business, and his wife's best friend, who despite wearing a niqab is well-versed in pop culture and hip-hop dance.

*The Infidel* seeks to question the commonly accepted and widely portrayed notion of a singular, often religious, identity defining individuals. Mahmud's various roles from Muslim father, husband and co-worker to Jewish son and friend portray a plural, multilayered identity where religion may well be one factor, but not necessarily the most dominant, overriding one.

*The Infidel* is funny, cleverly written and a rare interethnic experience. Where else would you find an Imran Khan number providing the musical backdrop for a shaadi and a barmitzvah?