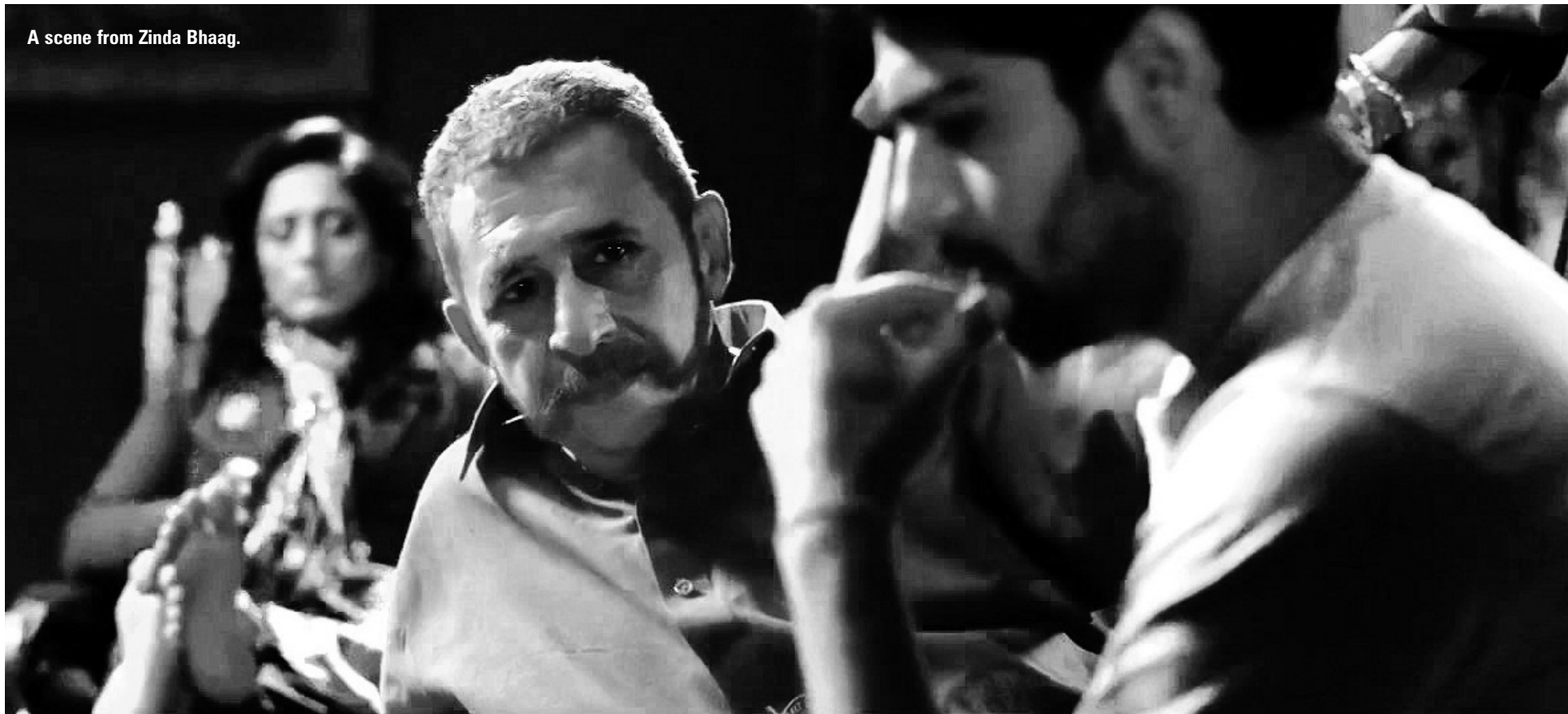


A scene from *Zinda Bhaag*.

Zinda Bhaag is a film about three young men trying to escape the reality of their everyday lives and succeeding in ways they had least expected. The directors of the film — Delhi-born and Lahore-based Meenu Gaur and Lahore native Farjad Nabi met when the former was in London, studying cinema.

“This is a very everyday tale, inspired by stories we heard from family and friends,” Gaur says.

“We wanted to make a film we’d enjoy watching. We wanted to show a Pakistan very few people know, with all its disappointments, successes — its scars, its ironies and its humour.”

Zinda Bhaag was Pakistan’s official entry, in the foreign language film category, for the Oscars last year.

How did this project take off?

My co-director (*Farjad Nabi*) had made a documentary about a group of young Pakistanis who died in a shipwreck while trying to smuggle themselves into Europe. When he went to some of the villages from where these people had come, the grief and devastation there was overpowering.

I met my future husband (*producer Mazhar Zaidi*) while I was in London and now we call Lahore our home.

Our film looks at the migration at any cost urge. It has humor, sadness, irony — and plenty of catchy music.

You will see a different kind of Lahore and a little seen Pakistan in the film. People either exoticize Lahore or make it a city of terrorists. We look at it from a very different perspective.

A little seen Pakistan

Meenu Gaur tells **Arthur J Pais** how her film explores new wave cinema in the country



How did you come to cast Naseeruddin Shah in a key role?

Naseer’s character is called Pehalwan, a *badmash* (*goon*) who’s larger than life. He is also a bit enigmatic and charming. We wanted someone who could carry this role — and his name popped up right in the beginning. We didn’t know him or know anyone who knew him, so we couldn’t even use any contact.

We found his e-mail address and his postal address in Mumbai. We sent him a few pages of the script and to our amazement he got back and asked for the entire script.

We were amazed that with so many films behind him, he still reads scripts that drop on his doorstep unannounced.

Not only did he commit to our film, but also conducted a two week-long workshop for other artists in the film who had no training in theater or films.

He’s also a household name in Pakistan, and has a huge fan-following there. Some people might say, why Naseer, why not a Pakistani actor. We would say, why not Naseer?

How has the film done?

We have released it in Pakistan, the United Arab Emirates, America and Canada, and it has done quite well. It is a gritty film but it is also heartfelt, and has terrific music from Rahat Fateh Ali Khan and a number of well known musicians. We will be releasing it in India in a few months and we are very eager to see how it will be received there.

Manu Gaur, right, and Farjad Nabi.