

# The Queen of My Dreams

by Fawzia Mirza



\*\* Official Selection - 2023 Toronto International Film Festival \*\*

\*\*In Competition, Sutherland Award – 2023 BFI London Film Festival\*\*

\*\* Official Selection - 2024 SXSW Film & TV Festival \*\*

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# **ABOUT THE PRODUCTION**

#### Tagline

Like mother, like daughter.

#### Logline

Connected through a shared love of Bollywood, a distant mother and daughter come of age in two different eras.

#### Short synopsis

Azra is worlds apart from her conservative Muslim mother. When her father suddenly dies on a trip home to Pakistan, Azra finds herself on a Bollywood-inspired journey through memories, both real and imagined; from her mother's youth in Karachi to her own coming- of-age in rural Canada.

#### Long synopsis

It's 1999. 22-year-old queer Pakistani grad student AZRA (Amrit Kaur) lives in Toronto with her girlfriend and has a strained relationship with her conservative mother, MARIAM (Nimra Bucha). Mariam and her husband HASSAN (Hamza Haq) are traveling to Pakistan to visit family, and on the trip, Hassan has a sudden heart attack and dies.

Azra immediately flies to Karachi for the burial. She is impacted by the sounds and smells of a city that are so distant and yet so familiar, her land, her mother's land. This flashes her back to her mother's youth – 1969 Karachi, in its 'Golden Age.' Here, a 22-year-old YOUNG MARIAM (also played by Kaur) is in conflict with her own mother, AMIRA, who insists Mariam must marry a man who will stay and live in Pakistan. Despite this, Mariam and Hassan's Bollywood love story unfolds. When it's revealed Hassan has accepted a job in Canada, Mariam's mother is furious, but it's too late to stop their plan to leave.

As Azra struggles with the loss of her father in 1999, denied the right to participate in burial rituals or even accompany the funeral procession to the cemetery - she's flashed back to her own childhood in 1989 Nova Scotia, Canada. There, Azra and Mariam struggle to fit into a mostly white, Christian town. Hassan has his first heart attack. Terrified of losing him, Mariam promises Allah she'll "submit" if he lives. After Hassan recovers, at Azra's 13th birthday party, Mariam catches Azra kissing another girl; horrified, she turns to religion for answers.

In 1999 Karachi, Amira, Mariam's mother, now has dementia, and confuses Azra for "Mariam." Azra explores Karachi, finds a bootlegger and drowns her sorrows on the beach. The next morning, she bathes her grandmother. Still seeing Azra as her own daughter Mariam, Amira apologizes for their decades-old feud. Azra's empathy for her mother deepens, realizing that Mariam will never get this apology from her mother directly. When Mariam and Azra finally visit Hassan's grave together, a new potential for connection emerges.

#### Director's Statement - by Fawzia Mirza

*The Queen of My Dreams* is a dramedy spanning 30 years in the life of a Pakistani-Canadian family. It's an exploration of the intergenerational connections between mothers and daughters, East and West, home and away, infused with humor, romance, music and Bollywood fantasy. Inspired by personal experiences, some of my mother's stories, intertwined with Pakistani history and collective memory. The film shows the expansive journey of women, seeking to define and decide their own paths, while simultaneously learning – and remembering – how to love. And it explores the question I find myself asking in all my work, "How do we become who we are?"

To answer that question, I turned to my conservative mother, a woman who seems so different from me, and yet, we are so similar. She's told me some stories of her past, which made her sound like a movie star, like the iconic actress Sharmila Tagore. But the past still felt like a mystery. I wanted to know more. I found myself nostalgic for her youth in 1960s Pakistan, 'The Golden Era' of the country. That was a place I'd never been, but I found myself yearning to visit. It didn't sound anything like the Pakistan I knew. And I just wanted to understand my mother better. It's why the 60s was such an important era in this film. Who I am is impacted by who my mother is, but also who she <u>was</u>. And who <u>her</u> mother was – our intergenerational connection. Inspired by this, and the South Asian cinematic device of "doubling," I made the creative choice to cast the same actor who plays Azra at 22 to play her mother at the same age in 1969.

Music evokes memory and nostalgia and the music throughout the film is intended to do just that. In fact, the film's title is inspired by the 1969 Sharmila Tagore hit film, "Aradhana" and one of its classic songs, *Mere Sapnon Ki Rani* (The Queen of My Dreams). It's a song about a man finding the love of his life, the queen of his dreams. I grew up in a heteronormative patriarchal society, so I always fantasized some man would sing this to me. When I came out as queer, I thought the song no longer applied, or rather, maybe a woman would sing it to me. But I realized I am the queen of my own dreams. And in Azra's journey in the film, she realizes she has the agency to step out of the generational mistakes made by her mother and her mother before her. Azra is the queen of her own dreams.

This film is my way of traveling to the past, to imagine a world my mother might have lived in. A world that blends genres — rich, technicolor, heightened scenes inspired by *Mere Sapnon Ki Rani* amidst the realities of grief and loss. This film folds those ideas into the storytelling through flashback, comedy, fantasy sequences, *qawaali-inspired* music set in the places that I've romanticized through memory: 1969 Karachi, Pakistan and 1989, Sydney, Nova Scotia, Canada.

Much like our lives, making this film has been a journey. It began in 2012 as a short film (also titled) THE QUEEN OF MY DREAMS and then a play ME, MY MOM & SHARMILA in 2014, after which I worked on the screenplay for seven years, in various iterations and collaborations, before entering pre-production, Summer 2022.

## BIOS

#### Fawzia Mirza - Director



Fawzia Mirza (she/they) is a White House Champion of Change in Asian storytelling, an alum of the Tribeca Film Institute, TIFF Writer's Studio and Filmmaker Lab, Ryan Murphy's Half Initiative, and the Canadian Academy of Women Directors' Program, and her new feature script HEIRLOOM was named to the 2022 Muslim List - The Black List's curation of the best unproduced scripts by Muslim writers. Her feature directorial debut THE QUEEN OF MY DREAMS, shot in Canada and Pakistan, world premiered at TIFF 2023, had its international premiere at the BFI London Film Festival and was nominated for the Director's Guild of Canada's Jean-Marc Vallée Discovery Award and the BFI's Sutherland First Feature Award. She co-wrote, produced & starred in the feature SIGNATURE MOVE which world premiered at SXSW and won 15 awards around the globe (including the US Grand Jury Prize Outfest). She wrote on Ava DuVernay and Greg Berlanti's CBS series THE RED LINE; her episode marked the first queer, Muslim romance on network TV. She wrote/directed the short films I KNOW HER (Palm Springs, Outfest, CBC Short Film Face Off Finalist) NOOR & LAYLA (BlackStar, Bentonville, Short of the Week, distributed by Frameline Voices, CBC GEM & Argo) BROWN ELEPHANT (20th Digital Studio, 2.3M views), and on TikTok series HIDDEN CANYONS. She directed THE SYED FAMILY XMAS EVE GAME NIGHT (written by and starring Kausar Mohammed) which world premiered at TIFF 2021, was named to Canada's Top 10 and one of Harper's Bazaar's "Best Christmas Movies of 2021". Her short AUNTIE, executive produced by Paul Feig, is now streaming on The New Yorker. She co-founded and runs BABY DAAL PRODUCTIONS with her wife, producer Andria Wilson Mirza.

#### Fawzia Mirza - Director's Filmography

The Queen of My Dreams (2023) - Feature Film (Writer/Director) Auntie (2023) - Short Film, streaming on The New Yorker (Writer/Director) Brown Elephant (2022) - Short Film, commission by 20th Digital Studio (Writer/Director) The Syed Family Xmas Eve Game Night (2021) - Short Film, world premiere TIFF (Director) Noor & Layla (2021) - Short Film, Audience Award @ Inside Out, Best Director @ Image + Nation (Writer/Director) I Know Her (2019) - Short Film, CBC Short Film FaceOff Finalist, 100+ festival selections (Writer/Director/Cast) Signature Move (2017) - Feature Film, world premiere SXSW, Outfest Grand Jury Prize (Writer/Producer/Cast)

# **KEY CAST**

Amrit Kaur - Azra Malik & Young Mariam



Amrit Kaur is an artistic hyphenate: an actress, director, and writer best known for her role as Bela Malhotra on the HBO Max hit series, *The Sex Lives of College Girls*. Kaur grew up in a Sikh family in Markham, Ontario. Her parents emigrated from India to Canada before she was born. Kaur began acting as an extracurricular in high school, serving as the senior captain of her school's improv team. She earned her BFA in theater from the School of the Arts, Media, Performance & Design at York University in Toronto.

Filmography - List of highlights The Sex Lives of College Girls (HBO Max) - Bela Malhotra Star Trek: Short Treks Kim's Convenience Hudson & Rex Nurses The D Cut

Praise for Amrit's performance in *The Sex Lives of College Girls*: "In a cast of standouts, Kaur is the superstar." (Chicago Sun Times Review)



Nimra Bucha is a British Pakistani actor who has performed in Theatre, Television and Film in both Pakistan and the UK. She is a household name in Pakistan starring in many popular television series, most recently the acclaimed series *Churails*. She can currently be seen as Najma in *Ms Marvel* for Disney+, which will premiere this summer on ABC. She is also receiving rave reviews for her lead role in Focus Features *Polite Society* playing the formidable Raheela. She is very much looking forward to the release of *The Queen of My Dreams*.

Filmography - List of highlights Polite Society, dir. Nida Manzoor (Focus Features) Ms. Marvel (series regular, Disney+) Churails

### Hamza Haq - Hassan Malik



Named one of Canada's Rising Stars by The Hollywood Reporter in 2017, Hamza Haq stars as Bashir 'Bash' Hamed in the groundbreaking CTV/NBC medical drama *Transplant* for which won a Canadian Screen Award for Best Lead Actor in a Drama Series in 2021, 2022 and 2023.

Prior to *Transplant*, Hamza played twins Amal and Gopal opposite William Shatner and Russell Peters in the CTV mini-series *Indian Detective*, and was recognized with a Canadian Screen Award nomination for his role of Raza Ali in the CBC series *This Life* in 2018. Early in his professional career, he hosted two seasons of the International Emmy Award nominated children's series *Look Kool*. Additional television credits include *Quantico*, *Designated Survivor*, *The Bold Type*, *Being Human* and *Best Laid Plans*. He will also appear in the upcoming family dramedy *Ruining Eid* (working title) for Netflix MENA.

On the big screen, Hamza currently stars in the Canadian independent feature *With Love and a Major Organ* and the soon to be released *The Queen of my Dreams* with Amrit Kaur. He has also appeared with Margaret Qualley in *My Salinger Year*, which opened the 70th Berlin International Film Festival in February 2020, and more recently had a supporting role in the French Canadian feature *Viking*. Additional credits include *Bon Cop*, *Bad Cop 2* with Colm Feore, *The Death and Life of John F. Donovan* directed by Xavier Dolan and Darren Aronofsky's *Mother*!

Hamza is a 2020 recipient of RBC's top 25 Canadian Immigrants Award and recently partnered with the Canada Media Fund's Made | Nous campaign as ambassador to celebrate Islamic History Month. He spoke at the 2021 TEDxTORONTO Fall digital event series 'Uncharted' using his public platform to speak on issues important to him, including refugees' rights, racial injustice, and combating stereotypes; and was honoured as Playback's Breakout Star of the Year. Raised in Ottawa, Hamza is youngest of four siblings born in Saudi Arabia to Pakistani parents and has called Canada home since the age of nine. He holds a Bachelor of Arts in Film Studies with a minor in Law from Carleton University.

# CREW

### Andria Wilson Mirza - Producer

Andria is a CMPA IndieScreen Award-Nominated producer and the co-founder of Baby Daal Productions, which she runs with her wife, filmmaker Fawzia Mirza. She produced Fawzia's feature film debut THE QUEEN OF MY DREAMS, a Pakistan-Canada co-production that world premiered at TIFF 2023. Baby Daal's feature slate also includes Sandra Itäinen's queer Muslim documentary COMING AROUND, and Drew Denny's GIFTED, which centers survivors of intimate partner violence with an all-survivor crew and creative team. Andria executive produced Lulu Wei's feature documentary SUPPORTING OUR SELVES for OUTtv, which was awarded the jury prize for Best Canadian Feature at IOFF23. Andria also serves as the Director of ReFrame, Hollywood's gender equity coalition founded by Sundance Institute and Women In Film (WIF), and is on the advisory board of Hire Survivors Hollywood and the management committee of Anita Hill's Hollywood <u>Commission</u>. Previously, she was Executive Director of Inside Out, Canada's largest LGBTQ film festival. There, she established the world's only LGBTQ Feature Film Financing Forum, launched two development funds, co-founded the North American Queer Festival Alliance (NAQFA), and spearheaded a multi-year partnership between Inside Out and Netflix. Named 'one of 15 Canadian women to watch' by the CBC, Andria has been a featured speaker at festivals including TIFF, Sundance, Cannes Marche du Film, SXSW, AFM, EFM, Comic Con, and the Iris Prize Producer's Forum.

Producer - The Queen of My Dreams, Feature Film (post-production) Executive Producer - Coming Around, Documentary Feature (wp Thessaloniki) Executive Producer - Supporting Our Selves, Documentary Feature (OUTtv) Producer - Gifted, Documentary Feature (in post-production) Producer - Noor & Layla, Short Film (CBC, Argo) Associate Producer - The Syed Family Xmas Eve Game Night, Short Film (TIFF 21)

#### Jason Levangie – Producer

Jason is an independent Creative Producer and co-owner of Shut Up & Colour Pictures. He has a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Film Production from NSCAD University. Jason has produced 5 feature films at S&C, and works as the company's creative director on client based work, as well as writing and overseeing the company's IP development. Aside from passionately developing the S&C slate, Jason works as a director, and a TV cinematographer.

Filmography - List of highlights Producer - *Kids Vs. Aliens*, Feature film 2022 Producer - *Night Blooms*, Feature film 2022 Producer - *Suck it Up*, Feature film 2017 Producer - *Saudade*, Feature film 2013

#### Marc Tetreault - Producer

Marc Tetreault is an independent producer and co-owner of Shut Up & Colour Pictures. He holds a Bachelor of Arts from Mount Allison University ('07) and is an alumnus of the Canadian Film Centre's Producer's Lab ('14). At S&C, Marc has been at the helm of 5 feature films in 7 years, and has additionally produced 2 other features films: Bruce MacDonald's *"WEIRDOS"*, which premiered at the Berlinale in 2017, and in 2018, Justin Oakey's debut feature *"A FIRE IN THE COLD SEASON"* starring Michaela Kurimsky. Marc is also a sought after line producer, and an expert manager of film, television and commercial content. He just wrapped producing his 3rd season of CBC's *"MOONSHINE"* for EOne.

Filmography - List of highlights Producer - *Kids Vs. Aliens*, Feature film 2022 Producer - *Night Blooms*, Feature film 2022 Producer - *Moonshine*, CBC Series 2020-22 Producer - *Spinster*, Feature film 2019 Producer - *Weirdos*, Feature film 2016 Matt Irwin is an award-winning, second-generation cinematographer with 30 years in the film and television industry. Now based in Toronto, he grew up in Southern California where he was trained and mentored by some of Hollywood's most skilled technicians and artists. Matt's career as a DP has taken him around the world shooting documentaries and branded films; Clients have included Red Bull Films, Discovery, Travel Channel, Time Warner/CNN, Jack Daniel's, and the National Film Board of Canada. His recent work on *Chasing Whiskey* earned a CSC Award for documentary cinematography in 2022.

Other work in Los Angeles involved a number of story-driven music videos, short films and TV movies for Comedy Central, fashion clips, and commercials. This eclectic background has developed a personal style that tows a line between grounded naturalism and expressionism— a line that will always shift with needs of the story. A believer that the only constant is change, Matt strives to never stop learning from each new project, from his creative collaborators, and from his fellow crew.

His recent narrative work includes CBC series *Sort Of* (S.2), *Tallboyz* (S.3), indie thrillers *Cabin Girl* and *Green Rush*, short films *One of Two* and *True Blue*, as well as 2nd unit work on *Resident Evil: Return to Racoon City* and NBC's *Chucky* (S.2). Matt is an Associate member of the Canadian Society of Cinematographers (CSC) and IATSE Locals 667 & 600.

### Simone Smith - Film Editor

Simone Smith, CCE is an editor working across film and television. For television, she recently edited two seasons of the Amazon Original series *The Lake*. Recent feature credits include *I Like Movies* (Canadian Screen Award for Achievement in Editing), *Float* (for Lionsgate, starring Andrea Bang and Robbie Amell), and *Firecrackers* (Canadian Screen Award for Achievement in Editing). *The Queen of My Dreams* (starring Amrit Kaur and Hamza Haq) is her latest feature.

### Alysha Brilla - Composer

Alysha Brilla is a 3X Juno Award nominated artist, composer, sound designer, music producer and creative wellness facilitator; with a special interest in bioacoustics and sound as a healing modality. Her work is driven by a deep belief in music's power to transform ourselves and our world, and is inspired by growing up with parents from two different cultural and religious backgrounds; a Muslim Indo-Tanzanian father who immigrated to Canada and a Christian European Settler-Canadian mother. Brilla has performed internationally including across Australia, Singapore, Tanzania and Chile. In addition to live performances of music, Brilla has conducted creative wellness workshops in schools for the past ten years; promoting storytelling through music and music production.

### **COMPANY PROFILES**

#### Shut Up & Color Pictures

#### http://www.shutupandcolour.com/

Shut Up & Colour Pictures is a boutique production company from Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. S&C has parlayed success in creative commercial, marketing & music production, into financing the development and production of feature films and television. We pride ourselves on a creative approach to media production and have won various awards for our music video production efforts in Canada.

S&C's has produced 4 features to date: the first film was Spanish-language, festival-tested "SAUDADE", (Ecuador, Canada, Argentina, 2012) which sold to STARZ & HBO Latino. The 2nd film was Canadian indie darling "SUCK IT UP", which premiered at Slamdance in 2017 and won best feature film at the 2017 Frankfurt B3 Biennale. Our 3rd feature film "SPINSTER" by Andrea Dorfman premiered at Whistler Film Festival 2019 and stars Chelsea Peretti. In 2021 we are close to releasing our 4th feature, "NIGHT BLOOMS", written and directed by Stephanie Clattenburg and starring Nick Stahl.

S&C Pictures is helmed by Marc Tetreault and Jason Levangie. Both are experienced in physical production as managers and supervisors, with many years of experience running various types of production, in 2021 we are currently producing a media art installation for the Guggenheim museum in NYC. Aside from feature films, S&C creates all sorts of client-based work, with clients like Warner Music Canada, VICE, and CBC. Having produced everything from live award shows broadcasts, to dozens of music videos for Canadians musicians, we are a distinctly regional enterprise, but with national clients, and a growing network of global partners.

#### **Baby Daal Productions**

#### instagram.com/babydaalproductions

Founded and led by filmmaker Fawzia Mirza and producer Andria Wilson Mirza, Baby Daal is a film and television production company operating in Toronto, Canada and Los Angeles, California.

Their first short film, *Noor & Layla*, commissioned by CBC Gem in 2020, has screened at more than 50 international film festivals including BlackStar, Outfest, Bentonville, BFI Flare and won the Audience Award for Best Short Film at Inside Out. It received US distribution through Frameline Voices, including a showcase on Alaska Airlines, and internationally through Argo. Baby Daal followed with multiple award winning shorts and branded content including co-production *The Syed Family Xmas Eve Game Night*, which world premiered at TIFF 2021. Baby Daal's first narrative feature film is *The Queen of My Dreams*. They are co-producing the feature documentary *Gifted* with Sundance Award-Winning prod co. Level Ground Productions (*Framing Agnes*) and executive produced feature documentary *Coming Around*, which world premiered in competition at Thessaloniki 2023. They have multiple scripted and unscripted projects in development, including Fawzia's feature comedy *Heirloom* which was named to the 2022 Muslim List, The Black List's annual selection of the best unproduced scripts from Muslim writers.

#### International Sales - LevelK

#### www.levelk.dk

LevelK is handling international film sales and aggregation.

We are specialized in rights optimization that are reflected through our innovative approach to crossplatform/cross-country distribution combining theatrical and traditional means - alongside digital distribution and marketing. Our goal is to bring our films to the market with an individual strategy so the film finds its own path to its audience and hereby increase royalties.

We are working with edgy, original films that we can market world-wide and that will resonate with international audiences.

Our profile includes high quality productions across all genres, working with established and emerging international talents in both English and foreign language. Films must have strong festival potential, international marketability, and digital possibilities as we work across all areas.

#### <u>CREDITS</u>

Director	Fawzia Mirza
Writer	Fawzia Mirza
Producers	Jason Levangie Marc Tetreault Andria Wilson Mirza Fawzia Mirza
Executive Producers	Damon D'Oliveira Anam Abbas Kamil Chima Carol Ann Noronha Robina Riccitiello Josh Peters Alexander Stegmaier
Cinematographer	Matt Irwin
Cinematographer Editor	Matt Irwin Simone Smith, CCE
Editor	Simone Smith, CCE
Editor Composer	Simone Smith, CCE Alysha Brilla
Editor Composer Production Designer	Simone Smith, CCE Alysha Brilla Michael Pierson Faiz Rohani Fizza Ejaz

#### **CAST IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE**

Mariam Malik Azra Malik and Young Mariam Rachel Hassan Malik Zahid Malik **Flight Attendant** Woman On Plane Sadia and Young Rani Amira Kadri Bijli Motherly Auntie **Proper Auntie** Worst Auntie Rani Khala **Dance Instructor** Rani Nani Irfan Kadri Rishta #1 Rishta #2 Gatekeeper Jenny Hassan's Mother Shopkeeper Young Azra Mrs. Shah Dr. Shah Jaya Shah Wayne Mr. Sharp Alicia Sharon Sturdy Woman #1 Sturdy Woman #2 Sturdy Woman #3 Bootlegger Flower Seller

**NIMRA BUCHA** AMRIT KAUR **KYA MOSEY** HAMZA HAQ ALI A. KAZMI **AREEBA SULEMAN** SHAMEEM HILALI MEHER JAFFRI **GULE RANA DANISH IRSHAD** SAMEENA NAZIR **ZARQA NAZ AZRA MOHYEDDIN BAKHTAWAR MAZHAR** SHEEMA KERMANI ZARA USMAN NISHAT KAZMI **ADNAN JAFFAR** HASAN ARIF ANWAAR **MEESAM NAQVI** VICKY ZHUANG YI-YIN **UZMA BEYG FAWAD KHAN AYANA MANJI TRINA CORKUM CARL GOSINE** SIYA AJAY WOLFGANG FOSTER JOSH MACDONALD **EMERSON MACNEIL CHARLIE BOYLE KRISTIN HOWELL** LINDSAY WATTERS THEA BURTON SAAD ZAMEER **MUJTABA HUSSAIN** 

#### **Technical Data**

Title: The Queen of My Dreams Original Title: Me, My Mom & Sharmila Genre: Comedy / Drama

Production Year: 2023 Month of start & end of shooting: Oct-Dec 2022 Country of Origin: Canada / Pakistan Shooting Locations: Nova Scotia, Canada / Karachi, Pakistan Post Production Locations: Toronto, Canada Language Spoken: English, Urdu Duration: 96 mins Shot on: Digital Frame Rate (native): 24fps Screen Ratio: 2:1 Format (ex. DCP, 35mm): DCP Sound format: 5.1 Unrated Copyright line:(c) Tiger's Eye Pictures Inc / Tiger's Eye Pictures ON Inc Production Company: Baby Daal Productions; Shut Up & Colour Pictures Producer: Jason Levangie, Marc Tetreault, Andria Wilson Mirza Executive Producer(s): Damon D'Oliveira, Anam Abbas, Carol Noronha, Kamil Chima, Robina Riccitiello, Josh Peters, Alexander Stegmaier Director: Fawzia Mirza Scriptwriter: Fawzia Mirza **Cinematographer: Matt Irwin Editor: Simone Smith** Sound Editor: Formosa Group Composer: Alysha Brilla **Production Designer: Michael Pierson** 

Cast: Amrit Kaur, Nimra Bucha, Hamza Haq, Ayana Manji, Gul-e-Rana, Ali A. Kazmi, Meher Jaffri

Financiers / Investors or other involved production partners: Telefilm Canada, Canada Media Fund, Province of Nova Scotia, Screen Nova Scotia, Province of Ontario, Government of Canada