

# LEYLAK

## Press Kit



Written by Mustafa Kaymak  
Directed by Scott Aharoni & Dennis Latos  
Starring Nadir Saribacak & Isabella Haddock

**Tribeca Film Festival 2021 | WINNER, Special Jury Prize | World Premiere**

Runtime: 16:58

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### Logline

In present day Queens, New York, a Turkish gravedigger is unable to face a shattering truth, and risks losing the dearest connection left in his life.

### Synopsis

Yusuf, a 45-year-old immigrant gravedigger in Queens, New York, struggles to make ends meet while taking care of his eleven-year-old daughter, Renk. Unable to face the reality of the toll of an illness on his wife, and consumed with guilt, Yusuf withholds the truth from his daughter. Several days pass and the weight of the truth, no longer containable, forces an unavoidable reckoning.

## Statement

*Leylak is the film of our times.*

Just three days after the New York Times prepared a powerful front page marking a somber and surreal milestone of 100,000 coronavirus deaths in the United States, Dennis and I (Scott) were sent our first draft of Leylak. Out of those 100,000 deaths, nearly 25% were derived from New York, the epicenter of the crisis. Our home. Our state. It was with these new death statistics that Dennis and I felt a heightened necessity as New Yorkers and filmmakers to tell the story of Yusuf. It furthered the reason why Dennis and I initially reached out to writer/producer, Mustafa, to create a story that highlighted the stresses of a New Yorker during the height of the pandemic.

As character study lovers and Shakespearean enthusiasts, Leylak presented a cathartic exercise and experience for us during this time of heartache. It allowed us to closely focus in on our tragic hero and step into the shoes of fatherhood - diving deep into the struggles and the emotional toll of being a parent during a time of uncertainty. What furthers the depth of the character study, is that our protagonist is dealing with not only grief, but guilt. What does it feel like to feel responsible for passing along a deadly virus to a loved one? And then...having to tell your daughter her mother has passed, but not sure how to tell her.

We questioned whether or not we were the right directors to tell the story of Yusuf - an immigrant grave digger from Turkey. We weren't immigrants and we didn't speak the language either. However, growing up in New York exposes one to all walks of life. To us, every New Yorker is family regardless of race, ethnicity, or religious beliefs. We are all in this together, especially, during a pandemic.

The culture and language differences helped us focus on the universal language of life and death. Whether it is grief, disbelief, sadness, depression, or loneliness - we all go through it. There is no right way to handle it or communicate with someone about it. Someone doesn't have to know what someone is saying to understand what they are feeling. That is why we decided to focus on Yusuf's struggle to tell his daughter that her mother has passed, rather than focus on the act of actually telling her.



More importantly, we focused on a moment in an immigrant's life - a life of a grave digger - an essential/frontline job that many people may not have realized was stricken with an extreme added level of physical and mental labor, during the Global Pandemic. We have a tremendous respect for all of the nurses, doctors, and medical staff during the pandemic, however, we felt this film gave us the opportunity to shed light on the other unsung heroes during this time that may not have been given the same love or appreciation they had deserved.

Leylak is a story that all can relate to. The last year or so has affected the entire world due to the pandemic. People have lost friends, family, and even their own lives. Our own experiences living through this isolation and tough times inspired us to put it down on paper. Death is a part of life, sometimes far too soon. And in this case, I wanted audiences to walk away knowing that family is everything and losing someone is tough, but it is important to lean on the ones you love since everyone goes through their own struggle and grief. No matter if you are young or old, a family member's death does in fact mature you, and change you. Not for the better. Not for the worse. But it is family that gets you through the tough times. There is always light at the end of the tunnel.

We dedicate Leylak to those who have lost their lives, the families who have suffered, and to the essential and frontline workers who put themselves at risk during these times of uncertainty.

### Bio's

Scott Aharoni & Dennis Latos are a directing duo based out of New York. The DUO have produced a diversified slate of ad campaigns for international brands and have produced several award winning films that have garnered international success under their budding production company, DUO Entertainment. Scott & Dennis were also recently featured on New York's CBS News Small Business Spotlight to discuss the growth of their production company, and their upcoming projects and goals in the industry.

### Scott Aharoni

Scott Aharoni is an award winning Independent Producer, Director and Creative Strategist. He is the Co-Ceo of Cinegryphon Entertainment, an American independent entertainment company specializing in film and television development, production

and financing. He was born in Great Neck, New York, and holds a Bachelor of Science in Film & Television from the Honors College at Hofstra University with Summa Cum Laude Honors. Scott has produced several films that have garnered international and critical success. His latest film, Leylak, won the Special Jury Prize at the 20th Annual Tribeca Film Festival. Scott has also been recognized and featured by CBS News's Business Spotlight in for not only his keen artistic eye, but his ambitious entrepreneurial approach to the film industry.

On a more personal note, Scott recently married his high sweetheart. Initially they were supposed to get married in April of 2020, but two weeks before the wedding, the pandemic put New York state on lockdown. They held their own personal wedding in their home with their loved ones that they live with. Scott is also a sleight of hand magician who has performed magic for thousands of people. Magic was one of the things that led Scott to fall in love with film. Movie magic was another level of magic that Scott fell in love with and wanted to unravel all the possibilities that come with it.

### Dennis Latos

Dennis Latos is an award winning director and producer from NYC. To date, Dennis has produced, directed, and edited several award winning short films. His short films have garnered many awards, received distribution, and are streaming on Amazon Prime. Dennis's company, DUO Entertainment has been featured on CBS and several other platforms as an emerging production company producing strong narrative work. Dennis has been mentored by Emmy Award Winning director and producer Greg Yaitanes (House, Banshee) and has worked under Warner Bros veteran Hollywood producer, Michael Tadross (I am Legend, Hitch, Die Hard). Dennis has several projects in the pipeline and is penning his feature film and developing a television pilot.

On a personal note, Dennis recently proposed to his long time girlfriend.



Yusuf Celik  
Renk Celik  
Tulay Celik  
Abdul  
Directors & Editors  
Writer  
Producers  
  
Cinematographer  
Production Designer  
Assistant Director  
Sound Design  
Original Music  
Photographer  
Poster Design

Nadir Sarıbacak  
Isabella Haddock  
Gamze Ceylan  
Samrat Chakrabarti  
Scott Aharoni, Dennis Latos  
Mustafa Kaymak  
Scott Aharoni, Dennis Latos  
Mustafa Kaymak  
Laura Valladao  
Anna Driftmier  
Lincoln Robisch  
Tristan Baylis  
Ahmet Kenan Bilgiç  
Eleri Ever  
Berkcan Okar (Yer Creative)

New York, New York

2020

**Nadir Saribacak (Yusuf)**

Nadir Saribacak was born on September 14, 1977 in Ankara, Turkey. He studied Turkish Literature at the University of Canakkale and worked as a teacher in Istanbul. He joined the Semaver Kumpanya theater company later on. Saribacak continued his training at Bahcesehir University, where he received his Masters in Acting. His career took-off after he starred in the film *Uzak Ihtimal* (2009), for which he received many awards in local and international festivals. Recently, he appeared in the film *Winter Sleep* which won the Palme d'Or award at the 2014 Cannes Film Festival. For his role in the Sundance World Cinema nominated film *Ivy* (2015), he received the Best Actor award at the Antalya Golden Orange film festival, as well as many others. Nadir moved to the New York City in 2016 and continuing his acting career in theater and films.

**Isabella Haddock (Renk)**

Isabella Haddock is an American-Turkish actress born in Auckland, New Zealand, on February 20, 2008. Haddock first began her acting in 2018, establishing herself with head roles in public school plays. She recently performed a lead role in a short film titled *Leylak* (2021). Isabella continues to expand her acting career today, living only a short distance from New York City.



### Mustafa Kaymak (Writer/Producer)

Mustafa Kaymak is the Co-CEO of Cinegryphon Entertainment, an American independent entertainment company specializing in film and television development, production and financing. He is a Sundance (Green-2019) and Tribeca (Leylak-2021) award winning writer and producer. He was born in Ankara Turkey, where he received a BA degree in journalism (2008 Ankara University). He holds two MFA degrees, one in Playwriting and another in Creative Film Producing, both from Columbia University. Recently he was awarded the Caucus Foundation & Annenberg Foundation Award.

### Laura Valladao (Cinematographer)

Laura Valladao is a Cinematographer based in Brooklyn, New York. Her passionate interest in light and deep connection to community inspire storytelling rich with honest and stunning visuals. She shot the short film "My Nephew Emmett", which won the student Academy Award in 2017 and went on to be nominated for an Oscar. Her most recent feature, "Premature" premiered in the NEXT program at Sundance 2019. Laura also shoots commercials and loves to work in new places whenever the opportunity presents itself.

### Ahmet Kenan Bilgiç (Composer/Executive Producer)

Ahmet Kenan Bilgiç is an award-winning multi-genre composer, producer, and music supervisor. He is the composer of Sarmasik (IVY) and Butterflies, two films that participated at the Sundance Film Festival where Butterfly won the Grand Jury Prize. He has worked on over twenty feature films and has a repertoire of eleven albums. Several of the movies Bilgiç worked for as a music supervisor were official entries at prestigious film festivals such as Tribeca, Rotterdam, Karlovy Vary, Palm Spring, Galway Film Fleadh, Thessaloniki, Istanbul, Stockholm, as well as Maine Int. Festival. He most recently completed scoring the short film Leylak, which has been enthusiastically received within the film festival circuit winning Best Short at the Tribeca Film Festival (2021) and Galway Film Fleadh (2021). In addition to that, he is one of the executive producers of the short. His upcoming projects include a highly anticipated TV series produced by Netflix



*Nadir Saribacak (Yusuf) and Samrat Chakrabarti (Abdul) in Leylak (by Eleri Ever)*

## Leylak

[www.imdb.com/leylakthefilm](http://www.imdb.com/leylakthefilm)

[www.duoent.com/leylakthefilm](http://www.duoent.com/leylakthefilm)

### Poster File

## Teaser Trailer

<https://vimeo.com/539756903>

## Social Media

[www.instagram.com/leylakthefilm](http://www.instagram.com/leylakthefilm)

[www.facebook.com/leylakthefilm](http://www.facebook.com/leylakthefilm)

@scottaharoni

@micokaymak

@dennislato

## Behind the Scenes Photography & Video

### Selected BTS Photography

### BTS Video

### Selected Stills

[www.flickr.com/leylakthefilm](http://www.flickr.com/leylakthefilm)

Tribeca Film Festival '21 - **WINNER**, Special Jury Prize (World Premiere)

Galway Film Fleadh '21 - **WINNER**, Best International Short Film

Rhode Island International Film Festival '21 - **WINNER**, Flickers' Jury Award, Grand Prize

Port Townsend Film Festival '21 - **WINNER**, Best Narrative Short

Short Shorts Film Festival & Asia '21 - **WINNER**, Best International Actor

Woods Hole Film Festival '21 - **WINNER**, Director's Choice Award

Sidewalk Film Festival '21 - **WINNER**, Kathryn Tucker Windham Storyteller Award

Nashville Film Festival '21 - Official Selection

Hollyshorts Film Festival '21 - Official Selection

Tirana International Film Festival '21 - Official Selection

LA Shorts International Film Festival '21 - Official Selection

Indy Shorts International Film Festival '21 - Official Selection

Boston Film Festival '21 - Official Selection

Breckenridge Film Festival '21 - Official Selection

Maine International Film Festival '21 - Official Selection

Upcoming:

Norwich Film Festival '21 - Official Selection

Indie Memphis Film Festival '21 - Official Selection

Scad Savannah Film Festival '21 - Official Selection

Tacoma Film Festival '21 - Official Selection

Newport Beach Film Festival '21 - Official Selection

Fort Lauderdale International Film Festival '21 - Official Selection

New York Shorts International Film Festival '21 - Official Selection

Lone Star Film Festival '21 - Official Selection

Sulmona International Film Festival '21 - Official Selection

Leiden International Film Festival '21 - Official Selection

New York Turkish Film Festival '21 - Official Selection

Seattle Turkish Film Festival '21 - Official Selection



**REVIEWS:**

[UK Film Review](#)

**PRESS:**

[Tribeca Film Festival Announces Juried Winners](#)

[NY1 - Leylak Wins Special Jury Prize](#)

[LRM Online](#)

[Film - Business - Scott Aharoni](#)

[Film - Business - Press Release](#)

[Alum's Film Honored at Tribeca Film Festival](#)

[Film Haif Zasi - Mustafa](#)

[National Herald](#)

[Madison Eagle - Isabella](#)

[Salt Lake Dirt](#)

[Queens Gazette](#)

[Short Films You Shoudn't Miss - Short Shorts](#)

[Indie Wire Announces Shorts](#)

\*\*\*Leylak means lilac in Turkish, symbolizing young innocence and it's the story about a father and daughter's relationship and their struggle to face tragedies they go through during the pandemic.

\*\*\*The movie was filmed during the pandemic and it's about the pandemic and the struggles that frontline workers were going through. The movie was dedicated to those who have lost their lives, the families who have suffered and to the essential and frontline workers who risked their lives during these uncertain times.

\*\*\*No cemeteries were available when the movie was shot. To catch the zeitgeist of our time, we found an empty field in Windham, New York and personally dug the 61 holes to create our own cemetery.

\*\*\*The story was written by the award-winning writer and producer of Green, the winner of 2019 short film jury award at Sundance Film Festival, on the 61st day of the start of the New York lockdown.

\*\*\*The movie features Nadir Saribacak as Yusuf who is known from "Winter's Sleep", winner of 2014 Palme d'Or Winner and "Sarmasik", 2015 Sundance Film Festival World Cinema Dramatic Competition nominee. It's his first movie in the USA.

\*\*\*This is the acting debut of Isabella Haddock as the role of Renk, Yusuf's daughter.

\*\*\*Laura Valladao, the DP, was nominated for Oscars with My nephew Emmett in 2018.

\*\*\*Ahmet Kenan Bilgic, is the composer of "Butterflies", winner of 2018 Grand Jury Prize at Sundance Film Festival.

\*\*\*Over sixty percent of our team consists of people of color and the LGBTQ community. We've got actors from Turkey, Germany, India, Macedonia, Mali and all the department heads are female.