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Memory Box

Reviewed by: **Amber Wilkinson**

"The memories have the vibrant immediacy of teenage energy and are treated by Hadjithomas and her co-director Khalil Joreige in the same spirited fashion." | Photo: Modern Films

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The past comes alive both for Canadian teenager Alex Sanders (Paloma Vauthier) and us thanks to this energetic and freewheeling adaptation of co-director Joana Hadjithomas's own teenage correspondence, which will transport us simultaneously to the worsening tensions of Lebanon in the 1980s, family's grief and the emotional bloom of first love, while also considering connection with cultural heritage and across the generational divide.

We start in the present day, as Alex prepares food for Christmas with her gran (Clémence Sabbagh), when the postman unexpectedly delivers a large heavy box. Her gran is at pains to keep it from Alex's mum Maia (Rim Turki) but though it is quickly discovered - containing months' worth of diaries, tapes and correspondence that Maia sent as a teenager to a friend who had left Lebanon, and has recently died - it is just as quickly pushed away in a corner of a basement by Maia, who isn't ready to step into her past. Alex, in a move that will strike a chord with children everywhere (even those who have long-since grown up), is drawn to this eclectic collection of items and begins to sneakily explore the contents.

The memories have the vibrant immediacy of teenage energy and are treated by Hadjithomas and her co-director Khalil Joreige in the same spirited fashion. Pictures initially spring to life or become animated like flip books or pop videos of the period, as Alex begins to imagine the situations that lie at the edge of the frames, while her mum (played in the earlier scenes by Manal Issa) speaks to her from the past via tapes about her clandestine relationship with fellow teenager Raja (Hassan Akil). Soon we're becoming fully immersed in these memories, shot with a warmth that contrasts with the modern era and fleshed out by music choices including Visage's Fade To Grey and Blondie's One Way Or Another. Sometimes there's a reminder that we are still in a remembered world, such as when burn marks appear on an image as Alex imagines explosions



The directors make balancing all of this look effortless, as the framing story of connection between mother and daughter and the reconnection between Rima and her past feel every bit as important as the story unfolding in Lebanon, where Rima's family were facing nights in air raid shelters and struggling with the death of her brother. Just like her mum, Alex is, in turn, sharing some of this with friends, a little reminder that though the methods may have changed, little is new in the world.

Reviewed on: 21 Jan 2022

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Three generations of women in Canada, deal with memories of their homeland of Lebanon.



Director: [Joana Hadjithomas](#), [Khalil Joreige](#)

Writer: [Joana Hadjithomas](#), [Khalil Joreige](#), [Gaëlle Macé](#)

Starring: [Manal Issa](#), [Isabelle Zighondi](#), [Rim Turki](#), [Manal Issa](#), [Isabelle Zighondi](#), [Rim Turki](#)

Year: 2021

Runtime: 102 minutes



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