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A Different Take on Tehran

by Cara Nash | April 21, 2010 15:35 | Edited April 21, 2010 15:39

Filmink recently chatted with Iranian filmmaker, Granaz Moussavi, about her film set to screen at the upcoming Human Rights Arts and Film Festival.
"Honestly, I'm fed up with this 'exotic' image of Iran in many films," Granaz Moussavi tells FILMINK about the motivations behind her debut feature, *My Tehran For Sale*. "It's not that Iranian films aren't good but the majority usually show that exotic aspect of Iranian life, or are about marginal ethnicities from rural areas. It's rare to see stories about the contemporary urban side of life in Iran and I wanted to make a film about this."

Shot on the sly in the streets of Iran, Moussavi's film reveals another side to Tehran - an achingly beautiful place with a vibrant middle-class urban culture where young people secretly listen to rock music, attend underground raves and silently rebel. "This film focuses on the middle class and educated people from Tehran, which is very urban and cosmopolitan. I wanted to give a fresh image of the country and show that people are not actually that different from one another, regardless of place or circumstance. The core of what youth want and that urge for freedom of expression is universal and I wanted to bring that in my film."

*My Tehran For Sale* tells the story of a stage actress named Marzieh - Moussavi's real life friend (Marzieh Vafamehr) - who is struggling to reconcile her love for her country with her desire for cultural freedom. Soon after meeting Saman (Amir Chegini), an Iranian man with Australian citizenship, Marzieh begins planning to escape. Originally she tries to leave Iran by orderly means but when her plans go awry, she resorts to contacting people smugglers and ends up in detention.

Immigrating to Australia with her parents in 1997, Moussavi says the film's script is largely drawn from her own experiences and other stories that have touched her. "When you watch the film, you sense a sort of autobiographical mood in the film that comes from my own experiences in life. It's really a collage of many stories," she explains. "I was also doing social work in Australia and interpreting at a detention centre for detainees, so I was exposed to many stories that detainees told me, which influenced the script."
Driven by a complex narrative structure, which cuts across time and between locations, *My Tehran For Sale*, is an accomplished effort, particularly considering this is Moussavi's debut film. "I wanted to cross the lines between the past, present and future, and also between documentary and fiction," Moussavi explains. "I wanted the story to remain vague and open to interpretation because this is the reality of life in Iran. It's unpredictable, chaotic and hazy, so I had to bring these elements into the form of storytelling as well."

Moussavi has faced a number of challenges in trying to distribute *My Tehran For Sale* and the filmmaker is grateful for the opportunity to have her work screened at the Human Rights Arts and Film Festival, which showcases a variety of eye-opening films and artworks. "It's wonderful that the film has been chosen to be shown at the festival. Unfortunately it's been difficult to have the film distributed and this is a real shame.

"I was hoping the film would be more welcomed inside Australia, especially as everybody's talking about supporting local productions," Moussavi reflects. "This is the first Australian/Iranian co-production and I hoped this could be a model for the Australian film industry to see that a collaboration with impossible film industries is actually possible. There is no need to think, within the Australian film industry, that we can only collaborate or co-produce with certain countries. I was really hoping that this film could potentially help the Australian film industry to expand."

*My Tehran For Sale* will screen at the Human Rights Arts and Film Festival in Melbourne May 8, Perth May 22 and Brisbane May 29. The screenings in Melbourne and Perth will be followed by a Q&A with Granaz Moussavi.

The Human Rights Arts and Film Festival will run in Melbourne (April 23-May 9), Canberra (May 27-29), Adelaide (May 14-16), Sydney (May 27-29), Perth (May 15-23) and Brisbane (May 29-30). For more information, visit the Festival [website](#).

Picture caption: Moussavi at the Toronto International Film Festival, courtesy of Getty Images. Photo taken by Jim Ross