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Persian Heritage

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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

I am sure that all of you have, at one time or another, been in a dilemma over something. A time when so many choices exist, that it is difficult to make a decision. This was the case for this issues editorial. Several events had occurred in Iran and here, that I could have written about. These events could have resulted in lively and heated debates. For example, in Iran there was the closing down of newspaper publications and the arrests of journalists and the critics of the government. There was also the incident that occurred when a literary and cultural group from Iran arrived in Germany for a conference. During this conference they were met with a tremendous amount of harassment. Some Iranians in the audience accused them of being pawns and agents of the Iranian government. This was interesting since some members of the group, upon their return to Iran, were arrested. State side, popular issues to be discussed were Elian Gonzalez, the up and coming elections, the scandal of Mayor Giuliani, gun control, health care matters, so on and so on.

Fortunately, I took a break from the turmoil in making this decision and read my e-mails. For the most part they were discussing the success of a young billionaire and his philanthropic activities directed to the third world and the needy of Japan. There were both negative and positive comments about the individual. Interesting enough, within the next few hours, I picked up one of the most prestigious business magazines found in the States. On the cover was another Iranian millionaire with his wife. Again, the article discussed the generosity of this young couple. To date they had donated millions of dollars to their respective universities and to other cultural and humanitarian organizations.

Their success is certainly commendable. What impresses me most about these young people is their desire to give back to society by supporting the arts and education. In essence, they are true representatives of what I believe to be "good human beings," and for that I am proud. I then recalled other individuals, members and organizers of small Iranian cultural and humanitarian associations whose hard work, sleepless nights and tremendous efforts have in a sense gone unnoticed. The individuals, who reach deep down into their pockets and give financially or if unable to give financially give through their blood, sweat and tears. They are driven with the desire to ease the pain and suffering often felt by the Iranian immigrant. They are driven by the desire to ease the pain and suffering of Iranians all over the world, who have for one reason or another fallen on bad luck. And, they are driven by their need to keep their culture and pride alive. I wonder, how much of the pain and suffering felt by these immigrants and others can be diminished by these young billionaires and millionaires, simply supporting these smaller organizations.

Thinking about these philanthropic actions brought me back to my youth in Ghoshan. I eagerly waited the arrival of the newspapers from Teheran. I remembered one issue having a picture on the front page of an elderly gentleman. He had a kind, serene and gentle face and a long white beard. He was Mr. Golbanganian, the founder of The Golbanganian Foundation, a cultural and humanitarian foundation, developed to benefit and support Armenians throughout the world. I was in awe of his generosity and closely followed his actions. There I would sit thinking, with the naivety of a child, that just maybe one day and Iranian would head a foundation like this. I dreamed that he would be richer than Mr. Golbanganian and far more generous. Everyone in the world would know him and admire him because of his generosity to all the needy in the world. Why did I think that an Iranian could reach such status and notoriety, because, I believe Iranians are not inferior to anyone else in the world. I believed this then and continue to believe this today.

Not to long ago I read about a Jewish Iranian family who donated enough money to a prestigious hospital to add a wing. In thanks the wing was named after them. Their names were eternally etched into the history of time. This type of generosity must be recognized. But, I wonder if this type of generosity would be perpetuated if "public recognition" was not a fruit born by the act of giving. Then, I returned to my initial thought about why our young millionaires and billionaires are not eager to support "non political" Iranian humanitarian and cultural causes and events. There are many



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responses to this thought. Could it be because that those contributions would not give them world recognition? Perhaps it is because they do not want to be recognized as Iranians? Could it be because the pain and suffering felt by their fellow Iranians are no longer realized by them? Could it be that they have forgotten their own pain and suffering? Could it be that they believe they worked hard to get to their position, therefore, so should every one else? Perhaps it is that they are just oblivious to the plight of their fellow countrymen or believe that time will take care of the matters? All these possibilities disturb me. The truth, I hope, is that they are not aware of the pain and suffering of the groups that work so hard to ease it. I especially hope that this is the case for those individuals who spent their formative years in Iran. I hope that they have considered the fact, that those years gave them the foundation necessary to earn the wealth they now enjoy.

Again, I hope that the reason is none of the above, but one simply of misunderstanding. A misunderstanding in believing that their achievement in wealth and recognition allows them to look down upon or forget those less fortunate. Or the understand-

ing of believing that, because one moves from the country of their birth means severing all ties from their culture and traditions. Other ethnic groups make their home in the States, yet continue to perpetuate their cultures. I hope that the young Iranian millionaires and billionaires recognize this before it is too late. Before, their lack of interest in their culture and traditions causes the extinction of our cultural presence in the States and the world.

I am an adult now and less naive. I know that with each generation our off springs become further rooted in this society weakening the connection to their culture. But, it is the recognition of ones roots, whether it is one, two or ten generations later, which forms the foundation of this nation. How sad it is to think that our youth may not be part of the foundation of the future. It is the responsibility of these successful young billionaires, older millionaires and those who have nothing at all, to insure an Iranian brick will continue to be part of the foundation of the United States and that Iranians recognized for their contributions to all those in need, just as I thought as a naive child.

Shahrokh Alavi



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THEY TOOK THREE

This year's Cannes Film Festival bestowed three awards to Iranian film makers, one of which is a woman. Samira Makhmalbaf received the Jury Prize for *Blackboard*. This twenty year old woman is not new to the movie industry. She is the daughter of Mohsen Makhmalbaf, a prominent Iranian film director. It may be true that Samira might have had a good teacher, but her films reveal her own natural talents, courage and drive. The applause she received as she accepted her award clearly indicated her acceptance by those in attendance. This was certainly her moment, but she did not stand alone. Through her tears of joy came her message, that she was a representative of "the young generation of hope struggling to save democracy ... and the promise of a better life in Iran."

Sharing the winner circle with Samira are Hassan Yektapanah for *Djomeh*, and Bahman Ghobadi for *The First Time for Drunken Horses*. It is obvious that Iranian film makers have been able to overcome obstacles that have plagued them into receiving the recognition they deserved. With this substantial showing in Cannes, the Oscar cannot be far away.

THE COLOR OF PARADISE

A FILM BY MAJID MAJIDI



"THE COLOR OF PARADISE" is a fable of a child's innocence and a complex look at faith and humanity. Visually magnificent and wrenchingly moving, the film tells the story of a boy whose inability to see the world only enhances his ability to feel its powerful forces.

At an institute for blind children in Tehran, parents are arriving to pick up their children for summer vacation. But long after the other children have left with their families, 8-year-old Mohammad (Mohsen Ramezani) is still waiting for his father to show. Mohammad contentedly passes the hours exploring the fertile spring earth at the perimeter of the school grounds. Underneath the damp leaves, he discovers a helpless baby bird. He uses his extraordinary sense of hearing to locate the mother bird's nest and returns the bird to the safety of its home.

Just then, his father Hashem, a widowed coal worker, finally arrives, only to ask one of the teachers if his child could be allowed to stay at the school permanently. Turned down, he begrudgingly agrees to take Mohammad on the journey to their home in the heights of northern Iran.

The landscapes they pass through are harsh, but verdant and spectacular, overwhelming the boy's senses, who is naturally attuned to his surroundings. But this splendor and Mohammad's joy in it, makes no impression on his gloomy father. If anything, it increases his melancholy. The bitter Hashem sees Mohammad as nothing but a burden. For all the adoration Mohammad feels for the world, his father feels equal contempt for the "bad hand" he's been dealt in life.

Arriving at the family farm, Mohammad is lovingly greeted by his two happy-go-lucky sisters and beloved Granny (Salime Feizi). He is delighted to be in the embrace of his family in this beautiful setting. The days are spent almost in slow-motion, at one with nature, where Mohammad and Granny seem most at home. It seems Mohammad and Granny have a spiritual connection.

But little Mohammad's peace is threatened when his spiritually blind father fears that the boy will be an obstacle to his hopes to marry a beautiful young woman from a strict Islamic family.

Hashem follows through on his selfish plan to ship the boy off to live in another area of the country where he is to become an apprentice to a blind carpenter.

At first Mohammad is devastated to be away from his family and fearful that no one will ever love him because of his blindness. But gradually Mohammad adapts to his new environment. In addition to learning woodworking, he also learns spiritual lessons from his mentor, professing "God is not visible. He is everywhere, you can feel him. You can see with your hands." But back at the farm, tensions between Granny and Mohammad's father are rising and eventually Granny falls ill. Mohammad's father's plans for remarriage are disrupted and he is forced to face his responsibility to his son. But is it too late? Will Hashem act in time to see that his son has truly been touched by the hand of God?

Courtesy of Sony Pictures Classics

ABOUT THE DIRECTOR

By Jamsheed Akrami

Born in Tehran in 1959, Majid Majidi developed an interest in acting at an early age and performed in several stage plays during his teenage years. He began his film career as an actor appearing in a variety of films for the Art Bureau of the Islamic Propagation Organization, including "Two Sightless Eyes" (1982), "Seeking Sanctuary" (1984) and "The Boycott" (1985), three early films by Mohsen Makhmalbaf. While acting for other directors, he also started making his own films.

After directing four short films ("Explosion," "Hudaj," "Exam Day," and "A Day with the Iraqi Prisoners" from 1984 to 1988), he made his highly promising feature film debut "Baduk" in 1991. Living in the border towns of the Baluchistan region, the Baduks are children who carry illegal merchandise across Pakistan's border with Iran. Majidi's daring film focused on the plight of a teenage brother and sister who are kidnapped and sold to slave traders. The film's uncompromising depiction of the mistreatment of children did not endear it to the censors and, consequently, it received only limited domestic and international exposure, which included an appearance in the 1992 Cannes's Directors Fortnight.

It took Majidi four years to make his second feature, "The Father" (1995). In between, he made the featurette "The Last Village," about the adventures of a government worker whose job is to carry children's books to remote villages. The central character in "The Father" is another stubborn and iron-willed 14-year-old boy who, unhappy about his mother's remarrying, wages an all-out war against his equally tough army-sergeant stepfather. The film won the top award at the 14th Fajr Film Festival, a domestic annual showcase for Iranian films, in Tehran, and went on to win additional awards in San Sebastian, Sao Paulo, and Turin. Majidi followed "The Father" with another feature, "God Is Coming," (1995) about a sick woman who writes a letter to God seeking help.



MAJID MAJIDI on "THE COLOR OF PARADISE"

THE IDEA FOR MAKING "The Color of Paradise" is rooted in my previous film "Children of Heaven." To cast the small part of a blind character in that film, I visited a number of centers for the blind in Iran.

In one of these centers, which was actually a school for children between ages 7 through 18, I saw several images that fascinated me. I saw how they were interacting with one another, how they were play-fighting, and even how they were playing soccer. They would follow the ball based on the noise that it was making. They would even score by hitting the ball into a wall and scream with joy. Not finding the face that I was looking for, I ended up casting a non-blind actor for the part. But those images stuck in my mind and, gradually, I decided to make a film with blind characters.

I wanted to make a film about the blind, but I had no plot. I decided to keep going back to the school and try to construct a plot based on my observations there. To my surprise, I did not find the kids to be shy. They were actually quite open to meeting new people. They found out I was a filmmaker and my film "Children of Heaven" had won awards. So, they kept asking me about it. One day, I read them the script of the film, which they enjoyed. Later, I took three of them with me on a trip to the Northern part of the country. I wanted to see their reaction to the outside world. I had only seen them interacting in the familiar environment of the school. During the trip, I was amazed by their strong sense of discovery. They were curious about everything. Nothing appears

"Children of Heaven" featured yet another strong boy in a heartfelt tale of triumph of the will in the face of extreme poverty. After helping Majidi to win the top prize of the Fair Film Festival for the second consecutive year, the film swept the top awards of the Montreal Film Festival in 1997. But its most glorious moment was yet to come. In 1999, "Children of Heaven" became the first Iranian film ever to be nominated for an Academy Award in the best foreign-language film

category. (The award was eventually won by Roberto Benigni's "Life is Beautiful.") "The Color of Paradise," Majidi's fourth feature managed to repeat the success of Majidi's previous film in winning the top prizes of both Fajr Film Festival and Montreal Film Festival in 1999. He is currently finishing the shooting of his new film "Rain," which is about a relationship between a young Iranian Turk and his Afghani refugee co-worker.



to be ordinary to the blind, because they have to explore everything anew each time they come in contact with it. Their primary means of exploration are their hands, which is why I started with a working title of "Hands that See" for the film.

What triggered the opening of the plot for me was the story a teacher at the school related to me. He told me the father of one of the students I had been working closely with had shown reluctance to take his son home to their village for the Iranian New Year's holidays. I immediately thought that the premise of a father who does not like his blind son could create the central conflict of my plot. I just needed to create motivations for the father, and several supporting characters. In the father-son relationship, I wanted to have a character who is blind but his heart is open to the beauties of life, and one who can see but is unable to appreciate the beauties and blessings around him. He is the real blind one. That's also why I gave him the occupation he has in the film. He turns the colorful natural elements in his environment into coal, which is something dark and ugly.

Throughout the film, the father wants to get rid of his son. But the moment his desire is about to become reality, he goes through a huge transformation. Maybe it's the shock of the river that awakens him to his dormant decent feelings. He jumps into the water trying to save his son. He is reborn at the moment. I wanted to reward him for his rebirth by keeping the son

alive. Many viewers have told me that they think the son dies in the fall. That's an individual interpretation. The film's Iranian title is "The Color of God," which alludes to the intervention of God at the end.

Nature is like a character in this film. The natural backdrop of the film is the Northern part of Iran, which is breathtakingly beautiful. But I was not interested in nature as beauty alone. In fact, I cut out several gorgeous shots of nature that I thought were not enhancing the story.

Nature needed to have a more important function for me. I was interested in seeing how the characters, especially Mohammad, were relating to nature. He appreciates the nature in a way that we are unable to. By using senses other than seeing, he experiments the inner beauty of the nature. I could not forget my own amazement when I saw the rushes for the first time. The environment was so rich that we began seeing things in the shots that we had failed to see when we were shooting. I think the experience of making this film changed the way I observe things around me. Nature was very generous to us. Sometimes during the shooting of this film, I really thought the hand of destiny was at work on our behalf. We were just taking what the nature was giving us.

To me, the actors are the most vital parts of a film. They are the ones who deliver the film to the audience. So every other element of the film should be at their service. Since I rarely use professional actors, casting of the non-actors to play key parts in my films is always a big challenge for me. With the exception of Hossein Mahjub, who plays the role of the father, all the players in "The Color of Paradise" appeared before the camera for the first time.

— Interviewed by: Jamsheed Akrami



THE COLOR OF PARADISE:

Seven Decades of Film Production in Iran

By: Jamsheed Akrami

Along with China, Iran has been lauded as one of the exporters of great cinema in the nineties. The history of film production in Iran, however, dates back to early 1930s when a few silent comedies added a domestic flavor to an exhibition menu that had featured foreign films for three decades. The first Iranian talkie, "The Lor Girl" (1934), was the first of several feature films made in India by an Iranian expatriate, Abdol-Hossein Sepanta, for the Iranian market.

After a decade-long lull caused by WWII, film production in Iran resumed in 1949. The technically inferior melodramas made in this period, set the foundation for a purely commercial cinema which dominated the Iranian screens for thirty years.

The decade preceding the 1979 Revolution saw the quiet emergence of an Iranian New Wave. A group of artists and intellectuals denounced the existing escapist cinema and launched a movement producing indigenous films of high cinematic quality and social awareness. The film that heralded the new cinema was Dariush Mehrjui's "The Cow" (1969), a disturbing tale of poverty and mental breakdown in which the mysterious death of the only cow in a village drives its owner insane and changes the collective life of the village.

Despite its poor box-office performance, the critical success of "The Cow" paved the way for a modest annual supply of Iranian "New Wave" films and an alternative film environment. It was this environment that helped breed a generation of filmmakers that are now considered the old masters of the Iranian cinema, though most of them are still in their late fifties. Beside Mehrjui ("Leila"), Abbas Kiarostami ("Taste of Cherry"), Bahram Bayzai ("Bashu, the Little Stranger"), Amir Naderi ("The Runner"), the late Parviz Sayyad ("The Mission"), and Sohrab Shaheed Saless ("Still Life"), are among the directors who started their careers during this period.

The New Wave filmmakers were hampered in their efforts by a harsh censorship code that essentially kept them from dealing directly with the unpleasant realities of the Iranian life. "The Cow"

originally was banned because of its uncompromising depiction of despair in an impoverished village. The film was conditionally released only after it won praise in Venice Film Festival. The codes forced the filmmakers to resort to symbolic communication in exploring social and political issues or make less complicated films about simple characters and ordinary situations. This explains the symbolic complexities of some films and the amazing simplicity of the others, including the emergence of a peculiar genre of films with child characters that were not necessarily for children.

The Islamic Revolution in 1979 initially struck a near-fatal blow to cinema in Iran. More than 180 movie theatres fell victim to the wrath of the fanatic arsonists who perceived movies as agents of moral corruption; film production came to a halt; many filmmakers were indicted, on charges such as "corrupting the public," and purged; nearly 2,200 previously shown domestic and foreign films were re-inspected and just over 200 of them received new screening permits. Even some of these films had to be cut extensively before returning to screens.

In an attempt to establish an "Islamic, anti-imperialist" cinema, a new set of highly restrictive censorship codes brought the film production under the tight control of the government. Most of these codes were aimed at the representation of female characters. Strict Islamic dress codes require women to cover their hair in public, and wear loose-fitting outer garments to cloak their body curves.

Also, women can only be intimate with the immediate members of their family. Therefore, actors playing couples could not even touch each other's hands on the screen. Female characters' hair should always be covered, even when they are asleep in the privacy of their home.

The restrictions, causing unrealistic presentation of women, have forced many filmmakers to give up on the idea of making films about couples and their relationships altogether. Abbas Kiarostami, the best-known Iranian filmmaker abroad, has refused to make films about women fearing inaccurate

representation. While making "Gabbeh," a film with a romantic theme, the writer-director Mohsen Makhmalbaf avoided writing any indoor scenes for his couples.

For the better part of the past twenty years in Iran, film censorship has been implemented in four stages: First, the script must be approved to ensure its content is appropriate; second, the list of cast and crew must be submitted to receive a production permit; third, the finished film is sent to the censorship board, which may approve it unconditionally, require changes, or ban it altogether; finally, the producers of the approved film must apply for a screening permit. The last stage subjects the film to a three-tier letter rating system – A, B, and C – determining the film's booking and its access to the media for promotion.

The election of a moderate president in 1997, brought the promise of new openness, which has been slow in realization. The apparent relaxation of the four-stage flow by eliminating the first stage (Script Approval) has not helped put the filmmakers' minds at ease, since they still have to go through the other three stages.

Film ratings in Iran don't have the same meaning they do in the United States. They have nothing to do with the content of the film. Rather, the ratings provide the government with a tool to grade the quality of the films. An A-rated film would be allowed to advertise on the government-controlled television, and shown in the best theaters at the most desirable times for a guaranteed period. C-rated films, on the other hand, not only would be denied promotion on television, but would be released for only a limited time in the worst theaters during the off-peak times of the film season.

All these controls, along with the government's monopoly on film stock and production equipment, amount to a multi-layered system of film censorship that not only decides the content of a film, but also determines how the marketplace will react to it.

American and European films are virtually impossible to import, since few of them would conform to the codes. The government is the sole importer of the limited number of films that are found appropriate for distribution. Film production is allowed in the private sector as well. An average Iranian film costs about \$200,000 to produce. The annual production has been steadily rising to the pre-revolutionary levels of between 60 to 70 films a year. There are about 120 directors making films in

Iran, of which about ten are women. But it is mostly the films of about a dozen elite filmmakers that account for almost all Iranian festival representations.

These elite auteur filmmakers include three different generations of Iranian "New Wave" filmmakers. The first, represented by directors like Kiarostami and Mehrjui, started no less than an Iranian film renaissance in late sixties; the second, led by filmmakers like Makhmalbaf and Rakhshan Bani-Etemad, emerged a few years after the revolution, and the third, whose most promising representative Majid Majidi won the first Academy Award nomination for an Iranian film in 1999 with his "Children of Heaven," saw their filmmaking careers blossom in the nineties.

Despite restrictions, Iranian films have been shining in international arenas over the past ten years. In 1997 alone, four Iranian films won the top awards in Cannes, Locarno, Montreal, and Tokyo. Major film festivals sometimes go out of their way to acquire a film by directors such as Kiarostami, Makhmalbaf, and Majidi. More importantly, the fact that every year more than a dozen new directors make their debut films promises that Iran will continue to remain a reservoir of fresh film talent and original filmmaking for years to come.

AWARDS

In Medicine...

On April 1, 2000 Dr. Malekshah was presented an award for his research at the 57th annual session of the American Association of Endodontist. His research subject was tumor necrosis factor (TNF) and its effect on endodontic lessons.

In Sports...

Iraj Ahrabi-Fard has been named Division I Coach of the Year by the AVCA (American Volleyball College Association). The award is given to acknowledge a current member who has made outstanding contributions to the volleyball community. He has been head coach of the women's volleyball team at the University of Northern Iowa since 1981, taking the team to, and winning, six conference championships. Additionally, he has participated in six NCAA championship tournaments and three trips to the NIVC. But his achievements do not stop there. Ahrabi-Fard has authored several books on the sport and coaching as well as a number of research papers and articles and videos.

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A gentle young lady stands half-naked in a pond, surrounded by blooming trees. Her black hair is loose. Her hips almost sway modestly. An exquisite prince hides to watch the sensuous body of that virginal girl, his future spouse. Is it Bathsheba taking her bath while spied by King David?

No, it's Shirin and Khosrow, a famous Iranian myth beautifully translated into poetry by Nizami. In fact it's a page of a Muzaffarid manuscript from the 14th century, one of the earliest known manuscripts. It could as well have been a later production since the repetition or adaptation of the same iconology connects early paintings to its later manifestations.

We actually pin-point one important paradox of miniature. The repetition through centuries of the same pictorial vocabulary haloes miniature paintings with a lingering feeling of eternity. It also cements a strictly codified tradition. The use of the same iconology often shared with western mythical stories such as "Wis and Ramin" who are kin to "Tristan and Isolde" reinforces the concept of universality. The same myths have sprang out everywhere with variations, alterations but the basis are the same.

However, it's almost impossible to identify and further more to appreciate most miniature paintings without mastering the standard repertoire of mystical and mythological themes. Every Iranian, high brow as well as illiterate, is supposed to know by heart most of Hafez, Saadi or Ferdowsi, the classical poets. But how many share the same visual culture? Although in Western countries people may read Ovidus and Virgile, how many are still able to recognize a scene representing Echo and Narcisse or Psyche and Cupido. Very few, merely because such imagery isn't part of their visual environment. No contemporary European or American artist would paint an 18th century portrait or a "vanity." No one would be interested anymore in the representation of Napoleon battles. So why do we, Iranians, cling to falcon hunts, picaresque battles or fawning courtiers. Whenever we

want to stress the importance of our civilization we refer to the past. It's natural to appreciate the tarnished images for being part of a glorious history, but should we stick to tradition and keep it alive without shedding the load of archaic icons.

In the 18th and 19th centuries a gap between miniature and painting was introduced with the invention of the word "miniature" by eager European collectors willing to define paintings enclosed in

and miniaturist who works and teaches in France, wish to keep the same refined patterns without neither any Europeanized perversion nor new concerns.

"I can't break with my culture in an artificial way. An artist is always influenced by its cultural environment. Therefore, I prefer to borrow from miniature some symbolic elements such as the arabesque, a typically Persian rhythmic design, horses, birds and cypress and intro-

MINIATURE PAINTING BETWEEN TRADITION AND MODERNITY

BY: ROXANA AZIMI



manuscripts. The use of oil-painting instead of gouache generated another difference. A change in the medium induced a change in the shapes. Bigger scales replaced progressively the small, minute devices.

Naturalistic portraits didn't represent life as it should be but life as it was. Canvas replaced manuscript sheets.

Taking those new parameters into account, is it still relevant to keep the old master's formulae without introducing contemporary issues? Some foreign artists such as Francesco Clemente have matched Indian miniatures with their own private world. Comic-strips have also been inspired by the Persian composition and balance between script and image. However, the graft of new issues to traditional imagery and vice versa hasn't borne much fruits among Iranian artists. Maybe miniature isn't the convenient media for such a combination. Some artists like Mr. Abbas Moayeri, an outstanding painter

duce them in my modern artistic production. In the origins, Manicheism considered miniature painting as a way to unveil the unknown, hidden part of the universe. The images were used to propagate Mani's religion like following the Christian policy. Even when you want to invigorate miniature with new influences, you must make a point of keeping the mystery without giving way to any trivial or prosaic images. You must purge all the unnecessary adornments and look for simplicity," argues Mr. Moayeri. Unfortunately, even when the technique is marvelously mastered, people are prone to wonder whether it's still *art* or merely *craft*. Some would even think that in spite of their beauty, those miniatures are works for tourists, copies of old manuscripts.

The evolution of Persian painting in the 20th century has long been hampered by the reluctance to give up old codes. From the clumsy flimsy looking miniatures of the 14th century to the highly

mastered devices of the late 16th, miniature has reflected the disparate influences linked to the numerous invasions of Persia transcended by the desire to represent an ideal world, melting together the ethnic and linguistic diversity of the country in a certain stylistic unity. The characteristic elements of Persian miniature are almost the same from the 14th to the late 16th century: intricate devices, a perfect balance between brilliant and subdued colors, a mastery of line. When you look at an old miniature you can feel a deep breath remnant of a mythical era. "People who come to my lessons are not just interested in the techniques. They are receptive to the transcendental aspect of miniature. People look for beauty and yearn for the lost Eden," points out Mr. Moayeri.

Is it worse hanging on the Fair Arcadia? Can't we use modern tools in order to create another kind of representation adapted to contemporary issues? Or maybe modernity is a vain meaningless word.

It has been common to intertwine the notion of eternity to most oriental work of art. Magic is still alive even centuries later. This magic often comes along with the misuse of modernity's concept. Western critics are amazed by the "incredible modernity" of an African mask, a Japanese print or a Chinese calligraphy. In their way to discover and accept other cultures, they feel the need to link them to the almighty notion of modernity inherited from the Renaissance. One should restate the meaning of modernity. As a matter of fact,

it happens to be extremely difficult to give a brief and accurate definition of this concept which is philosophical, aesthetic as well as economic.

Modernity is supposed to be the most positive value of the 20th century. It derives from the capitalistic notion of productivity and speed. Miniature paintings, commissioned by princes, slowly and delicately realized in a royal work-shop, has obviously nothing in common with the striking economic modernity. What western countries abusively name modernity, stems from a major misunderstanding of the oriental vision. Frontality, a taste for void, stylized human figures, purity of line, geometrical arrangement of space, all the rhythmic elements that shape most oriental visual devices have become the principles of a so-called western modernity. The misapprehension of oriental philosophy leads to other confusions. Repetition for instance is regarded as mere copy whereas it holds a positive meaning in eastern philosophy. It helps to suffuse and unify a collective imaginary. "I personally make no copy in the way foreigners mean it. My compositions are all unique. The way I paint is quite similar to the way a Persian musician tackles a piece of music. Whenever he plays, following the repetitive musical form (see how arabesque is everywhere), he creates something new, with unnoticed modulations," says Mr. Moayeri. Nonetheless, even if contemporary western art refers more and more to a repetitive style (techno music, serigraphy, prints) this concept is still mainly dismissed.

Modernity doesn't make an easy marriage with Persian tradition, at least as far as painting is concerned. A brief survey of other artistic fields such as cinema and video reveal harmonious innovations. Artists such as Abbas Kiarostami or Shirin Neshat, both worldly acclaimed, give a beautiful merge between traditional imagery and modern tools. Their narration is fluid, the message they convey is easy to understand. Their works focus on contemplation and mystery. They let their eyes roam on a landscape or on a veiled face. Subtly, almost insidiously, they pluck off the different layers of an image, like a woman who slowly takes off her clothes, revealing her intimate mystery. "You must raise human's soul: that's my idea of modernity," Mr. Moayeri asserts. In a certain way, they fulfill the purpose of old miniatures much better than many contemporary painters.

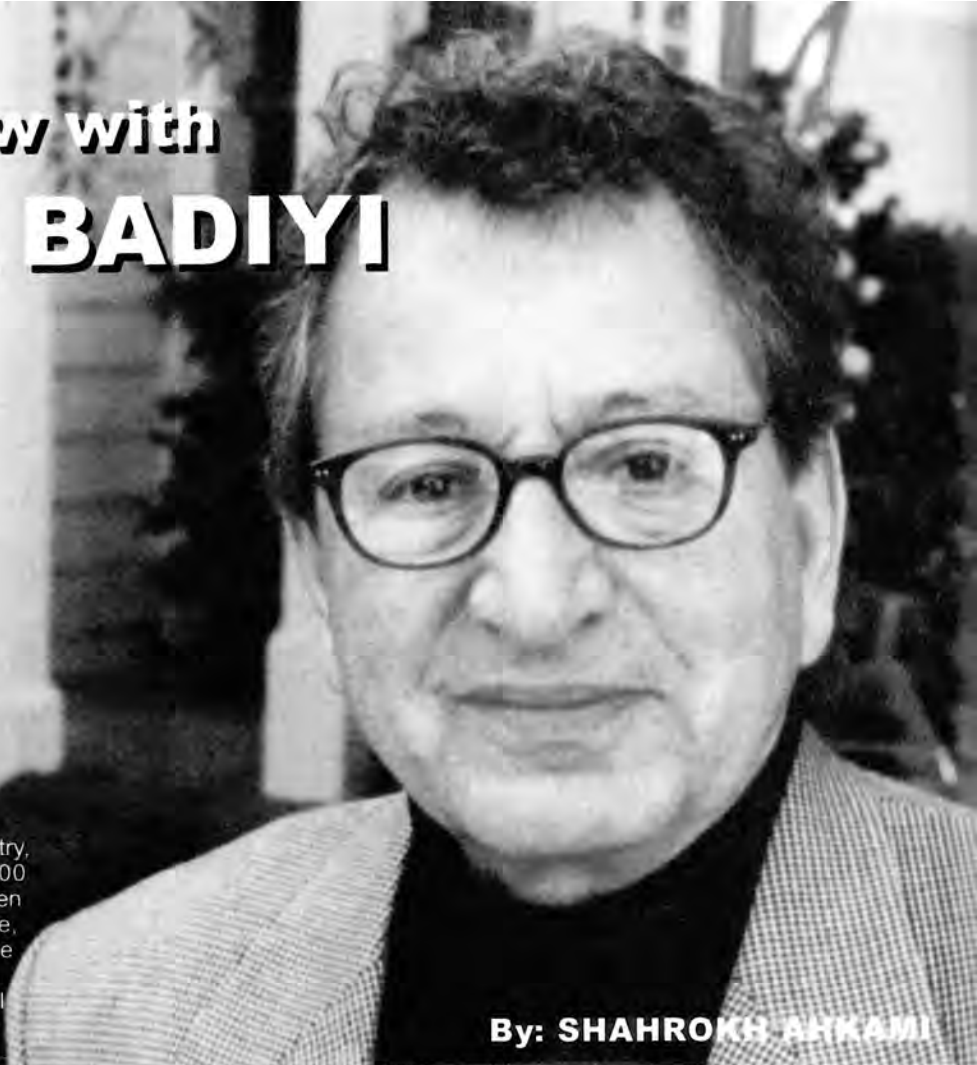


An Interview with REZA BADIYI

At the age of 61, Reza Badiyi's accomplishments have exceeded his dreams. His achievements in directing TV films include: *Manix*, *Hawaii Five-O*, *Mission Impossible*, *Police Squad*, *Falcon Crest*, *Starsky and Hutch*, *Baretta*, *Cagney and Lacey*, *The Trials of Rosie O'Neill*, *The Rockford Files*, *Nowhere Man*, *La Femme Nikita*, *Buff the Vampire Slayer*, and *Sliders*.

He was black listed as a result of the Iranian hostage situation, but overcame this, never once denying his heritage. His constant source of motivation remain his wife and their extended family. To Reza life has been wonderful, the bumps along the way just part of the journey. To the film and television industry, he is a wonder, having directed over 400 episodes of television to date. In an article written by David Geffener in the April-May 1998 issue, the Directors' Guild Association took the time to honor this deserving gentleman director.

Join us now in an interview that will leave you with the desire to know more....



By: **SHAHROKH AHKAMI**

Persian Heritage: Mr. Badiyi, please tell our readers something about yourself?

Reza Badiyi: I was born in Soltanabad Arak, Iran. We moved to Teheran in 1318 (1939). At the time I was ten. My parents had seven children and I am the fourth and youngest son.

You are a graduate of Darolfonun?

RB: Yes. Following that I went to Academy of Drama in Iran. There, I received the gold medal of honor from the Shah. From there I worked as a camera man. Approximately one year later, I joined the Iranian American Audio Visual Center of the Ministry of Education. And two years after that, I shot a co-production with Syracuse University, *The Flood in Khuzestan*. It was filmed in 16mm, but we ended up with an award. Because of this film, I was invited to the U.S. and Syracuse University. For the most part, this was a wonderful experience, but I was placed in a fundamental photography

course, when I had already completed twenty one documentaries.

When was this?

RB: This was in 1955. While at Syracuse, I made another film for Mitchel Camera, which got me a scholarship.

Where to then?

RB: I moved to Kansas City, Missouri, where I worked for The Calvin Company, which specialized in industrial films and documentaries for the U.S. Information Agency. It was there that I got my break, when I met Robert Altman. At that time, he was not yet well known, but it was this encounter that would eventually have a tremendous impact on my life. I was in awe of his talent. Shortly after our introduction, he fell out of grace with his superiors and moved west. After a brief return to Iran, I came back to Kansas City where I worked for Horizon Productions and NBC News as a camera man.

This position gave me the opportunity to travel throughout the world.

PH:second. You said that you returned to Iran in 1956. Why did you only stay one year?

RB: Before going back to Iran, I had visited the west coast. There, I was introduced to several big names in the industry, such as Alfred Hitchcock, Josh Logan, etc. I observed their work and their passion for it. Iran, at that time, did not have that same passion for film making. Coming from the west coast, my mind was full of ideas for new projects when I arrived in Iran. My co-workers were telling me to "cool it," but I couldn't. It was my love.

Was your move back to the States easy?

RB: No, not at first. Eventually, my career picked up, but that came after I won an award for cinematography for "Missouri State Parks." It was a documentary that Eastman Kodak Company had seen and was impressed by.

How did you get to the West

coast?

RB: Robert Altman convinced me to move to Hollywood. When I got there, I was contracted with Universal as a cinematographer for the Kraft Suspense Theater. Immediately, I was smitten with TV. I was also fortunate to have worked with Sam Peckinpah, on *Noon Wine*. From that point my career soared.

What was the first TV show you directed?

RB: *NYPD*.

What is it about directing that you love?

RB: There are so many reasons, but I believe it was mainly because you got to tell a story. Of course as a director you do not tell the story with words, but with pictures and images.

What else does it take to become a director?

RB: A good director is one that is not just technically skilled. He/She must know all the tools of his/her trade, and those include the story, the use of space, lighting, the actors, the scenery, the costumes, the props, etc., etc. The director must take these tools and mold them together into the final project.

What is responsibility of the director?

RB: To take these tools and work them toward your goal, the finished piece and keeping it within the time frame. In this industry time is money.

How do you format and calculate the tools with the element of time?

RB: You have a blueprint, it is called the script. As the director you have the responsibility of keeping to the blueprint.

So where is the glamour or satisfaction in the business?

RB: It is in the final project. But getting there is a tremendous amount of pressure and it comes from all direction. You must learn how to categorize them in a way that will allow you to tell the story and tell it within the budget. If you don't you answer to the producers.

How do you learn directing?

RB: Of course, there is a certain aspect that you learn from books, but experience, like in all else proves to be the best education, hands on. I must add a caveat, however, and that is the more you know about your surroundings, everything, the better a director you will be. As a director you must have knowledge of the entire picture. Certainly you add your own creative style to the equation, but if your style does not fit the situation, you must also learn to defer.

One who is considering becoming a director must also be familiar with writing. It is not just the visual.

At this point, I would like to go into a little depth about your work — first: Mission Impossible. This show was ahead of its time, how did you create this?

RB: I did not create the series, it was created by Bruce Geller. My role was to bring his creation into a visual story. The show was an enormous amount of fun and allowed all of us to be creative. If you are a fan of the show, I suggest you buy a book called *The Complete Dossier of Mission Impossible*. It gives you the statistics on the series. In the book, I am called Mr. Mission Impossible. It seems I hold the record for shooting the most episodes. Mission Impossible was a wonderful experience for me since I was given so much freedom in its creation. Often, I got carried away. One example is an episode with the late Greg Morris. If you remember, Greg was always measuring things in the show. This set was in the basement of a castle. Greg was about to measure something and realized he did not have a tape measure. I suggested we use "vajab" (the Iranian method of measuring something with your hand). We in fact used it. You would not have believed the reaction we received. People called and wrote asking "What was that?" and "what was that from?" That's what I mean by getting a little carried away.

I was about to ask you if your heritage had any effect on your creative style. In what other ways have you been influenced by your heritage in your profession?

RB: The way we read? If you am

born in the west you are taught to read from left to right and to see things in the same direction. We, on the other hand, are taught to read right to left.

Therefore, when I look at a picture, I see it from the northeast corner first. I film in the same manner, from right to left. Sam Peckinpah, the great American director, once said if you made him look at ten films he could tell you which ones were mine.

When we talk about our personal visual, how we view things, you will see that you are always influenced by your earlier environment. We come from a country that produces beautiful carpets. You could say we were born on them. They are full of designs. Because of this, they are part of our blood, heart and soul.

We identify with them. They become part of our thoughts and therefore part of our work. It is what makes us a little more visual and a little unique, at least for me.

Another part of our culture that stays with me and affects my life and work is our poetry. When I came to the States in 1955, I did not leave my poetry behind. To this day I recite it. Persian poetry is more than words, each word is an image.

The fact that you have used your heritage in your daily life and work, rather than deny it, speaks highly of you.

RB: I could never and would never deny my heritage, my roots. In doing so I would only mask an issue that would remain a fact: what I am. And, believe me, there were times when masking my identity would have been to my advantage. But then, what would that have made me?

How and when could denying your heritage been useful?

RB: During the hostage crisis. Remember, I was at the height of my career. I worked with wonderful people and therefore some actions against me disturbed me. I would often leave a set to find slurs written on my car. I could not believe that the people I was working with could turn like this without understanding the entire situation. It bothered me that they were judging me because of others' actions.

On a side note, it taught me that valuable lesson: not to judge a situation or a person because of what I read, but rather on what I experience.

To answer your question, after the hostage situation I was not being offered the same level of work as before? Never, however, for one second, did I consider

denying my heritage or changing my image. I am an Iranian, I was born there. I never wanted to be anything else. It is who and what I am.

Do you have any bitterness?

RB: Absolutely not. It was simply part of the course of my life. I had to learn how to deal with it and rise above it. Again, what disappointed me was that I was being judged on where I was born rather than on who and what I was. Fortunately, I had many friends and my family to support and continue to support me emotionally. They are priceless.

Did you eventually worked again?

RB: Yes, but not at the previous level.

Again, I am moved by your actions and words. Do you have any advice to give our young readers, whether Persian or of any other ethnicity, who shy away from their roots?

RB: Yes, but you must understand a difference that exists among generations. Some deny their heritage because they are trying to avoid or protect themselves from a storm. Life itself, however, is a storm. You and I were born in Iran and moved here at a later age. Therefore there is no denying who we are; we should be proud of it.

Then, there are our children, born in the States. They are a different nationality and their peer groups, etc., influence them. They must be taught to be proud and not embarrassed or ashamed of their heritage.

We, as parents, must also understand their position. We must try to make them understand that one's dignity is premised on the fact that one lives a truthful life and not a deceitful one. For me, I was born in Iran, my parents were Iranians, I am an Iranian, and will always be an Iranian.

Back to your profession. The television shows you directed are so diverse. What I mean is: the subject matter of, say, Falcon Crest differed so much from Mission Impossible. How do you prepare yourself for the change in the theme/format?

RB: If you are a professional, the transition from one format to another should go unnoticed, even though you may be more comfortable in one than the other. If you are unable to make the change smoothly, then I doubt that you will remain in this business for long. As for me, I loved all the shows. With each, I was faced with a different creative decision.

Mission Impossible was a spy series, while *Falcon Crest* was a night-time soap opera based on fame and wealth, and on who would be the first to stab the other in the back. I did forty seven episodes of *Falcon Crest* and enjoyed every one of them. How could I not? Look at the wonderful people I worked with: Jane Wyman and David Selby.

Most of it was filmed in Napa Valley, so it was like being on vacation. In terms of creativity, *Falcon Crest* was not nearly as difficult at *Cagney and Lacey*.

In all your work to date, do you have a high and low point?

RB: This is a difficult question to answer, but I will try. You see, I have worked on very big projects with huge budgets that have been as rewarding as my small budget projects and vice versa.

What were some lower budget productions you enjoyed?

RB: Working with Julie Harris, the late Joe DiMaggio, and Micky Rooney on *First of May*. There are times that you find a script that is simply a gem and allows you to shine, while there are others that you will have to learn how to tap dance in order to make them interesting.

Moving to more modern times, what projects are you currently working on?

RB: I have done a few episodes of *Nowhere Man*, *La Femme Nikita*, *Sliders*, and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. They target a younger audience and have tight schedules and small budgets.

If you could rewind your life, would it be different?

RB: In life there are no second chances, not even if you are an Iranian.

Consequently, I have learned to live each day to the fullest. But if I could make one change, it would be to have received more education.

You have achieved such a high level of success, why the need?

RB: Most of my family went on to receive their doctorates, in medicine, etc. I left school after my masters. I was so eager and thirsty to work. I am impressed with people who are multilingual or know about many things. I think the more knowledge you have of what is outside your profession, the better a director you can be.

They key ingredient to being a good director is exposure. Knowledge is strength — different from financial



strength, but much more stable.

What advice other than education can you extend to our readers who are contemplating about becoming a director?

RB: You cannot be lazy. Five a.m. wake up calls are the norm and you must be on time. You must be committed to working long hours, with gratification not often coming until the project is completed. One good thing about television, unlike writing a book or doing a feature

film. is that your work is often seen within three weeks after completion. Another factor in being a good director is your ability to accept criticism: you should be your toughest critic.

Speaking of critics, have they, in your opinion, been fair to you?

RB: Much fairer than I have been to myself. Yes, I have been lucky. In fact, I can remember only once when I was beaten down by them. It was a movie — *Trader Horn*.



Reza Badiyi and John Ghaffari

Earlier we briefly addressed the actors and actresses you worked with. Can we embellish those stories?

RB: I worked with many wonderful people. One whom I most admired was Jane Wyman. Jane is a consummate professional. She was always asking about my family and had a particular interest in my home. Let me explain. One day she came to the set and asked me not to give her the first scene of the day. She explained that she had to drive a long way to get there. She then asked me where I lived. I told

her that I had just moved into a house on a certain street. Her eyes opened wide and she asked me what number. I told her. She smiled and walked away. A few weeks later, I asked her why she was so interested in my home. She then told me that when she was married to Ronald Reagan, they lived in this house. It was amazing. She would bring me pictures of the house. One day, Jane asked me what I did with the room behind the children's room. I said there is no such room; there is only a closet. Upon her insistence there was, I went home and to my amazement, in the closet there was a door that opened into a huge room. Eventually, I made it a playroom and storage room for the children's toys. We call it "Jane's room." Another I worked with was Jason Robards, one of the great American actors. I also had the pleasure of working with George C. Scott, shortly before he died. He was a giant of a man and a giant of an actor. We were filming something in Atlanta with Carol O'Connor. We had Mr. Scott and him for seven days with Carol O'Connor, in *In the Heat of the Night*. Well it seems that during the run of this series, (I believe seven years), Mr. O'Connor had a female limo driver. He promised to use her in the show but never did. We were now doing the last show. Not wanting to break his promise, Carol told her that she was going to be the detective who goes to the mansion of George C. Scott to arrest his nephew. She had about three to four lines.

Well, she walks into the library, looks at Mr. Scott and freezes. She was petrified. We cut and George came over to me and asked me who she was. I explained the story and he said OK. He then went over to her, introduced himself to her, and began to have a conversation. He talked to her for forty five minutes. Then explained how she should say her lines. We rolled again and it was perfect. It was his way.

It seems that you have a sense of appreciation and gratitude to these actors.

RB: Oh yes. The memories of them stay with you. You collect them and place them in your back pocket. When I reflect back, they always bring a smile to my face, wonderful memories.

Was there anyone else?

RB: So many: Doris Day — a delight, Jack Lord. Now there was a tough man. He had a high work ethic and ex-

pected nothing less from those he hired. If you did not fill his expectation you were fired. You have to remember he was not only the star of the show, but, also the executive producer. I think I did thirty nine shows with him.

Another tough one was Robert Blake. A great guy, but hard to work with. Fortunately, we always got along, but most of the crew was afraid of him. I was often asked by the "tower people" to be a liaison. Everybody felt sorry for me, but I did not mind. I understood him, I knew what he was all about. Our negotiations sometimes took a little time, but he would finally come around. The shows were wonderful.

Why have Iranians not been able to achieve the same success as actors in the States?

RB: I want to clarify your question. I assume you are talking about Iranian actors in this country? I believe the reason is the language barrier. I do not know if you know John Ghaffari. I had the opportunity to work with him. He is a very capable actor, gifted and talented, but his accent is hard to understand. Don't get me wrong, he has wonderful command of the English language: it just sounds Italian. If you look at the credits in films, you will see Iranians often cast in Italian roles. So, these talented actors have not had the exposure to make them "big" stars. This is changing, especially with the acceptance of the independent films and subtitles.

Now on the other side of the question, although they may not be big stars in the States, they are, in Iran. Iranian actors, producers and directors are bringing us some wonderful award winning quality films and the west is hungry for them. All good things take time.

Have you ever returned to Iran?

RB: Yes, recently, after twenty-five years. I was there for almost three weeks and am eager to return. Of course, there are some things that have changed to the better and others for the worse.

And your family? ...

RB: I am married to actress Tania Harley. We have two children, age nine and eleven. Both my new and extended family are very close and supportive. **I am a very lucky man!!!** ☺