

THREE IRANIANS IN FRANCE

MARYAM GOORMAGHTIGH ON GETTING BACK TO HER ROOTS



The engaging Iranian protagonists of *Before Summer Ends* in the south of France.

by Michael Stein

One of the most unique and touching films at this year's festival is Maryam Goormaghtigh's *Before Summer Ends*, a documentary comedy road-trip film featuring three Iranian men living in France.

The story begins when Arash – after living in France for five years – tells his friends Hossein and Ashkan that he wants to go back to Iran. Hoping to talk him out of it they take him on a two-week road trip to the south of France, where the three friends swim, discover another side of their adopted country, hold incredibly intimate discussions about their lives along with topics ranging from religion to their childhoods to dealing with military service in Iran. And then they meet two French girls, which could change everything. At a time when Muslim immigrants in Europe are routinely being painted as threats by the media this is a very human depiction of three men and their deep and compelling friendship.

How did the film come about?

The whole story of the film is I met these three guys four years ago. I've always been very interested in Iranian culture because my mother is Iranian, but I've never been taught the Persian language so I was kept at a distance from my Iranian roots. When I was about 30 years old I started to learn the language and reconnect to my original roots and then I met

these three guys in a cafe. They were speaking Persian and we started to talk. There was immediately a real vibe between us, we really understood each other. So we started to meet each other and after the third or fourth meeting I brought my camera and started filming them. I told them that I wanted to make a film about them. We've been filming for three years.

Once you came up with the idea for the film, why did you put it in the form of a road trip?

First of all, I've always loved road movies. It's a genre I've always found inspirational. And I'm inspired in particular by Satyajit Ray's film *Days and Nights in the Forest*, which is not a real road movie but it is about four men who go far away from where they live. And another film reference is a French film by Alain Cavalier called *Le plein de super*, (*Fill 'er Up with Super*, in English), which is also about four men who go to the south of France and it's a road movie. Also the idea comes from two of the characters in the film, Hossein and Ashkan, because they think that going far away from Paris, the capital, which is not that welcoming, will be a good idea to change the mind of the main character, Arash, so he can see different people who are nicer and more sympathetic.

Can you say something about the relation between the

documentary and fictional aspect of the film?

At the very beginning it was a film about them, more a documentary, but little by little they sort of took the film as their film and started to become more and more involved in it, and started to tell their own story. Then, when Arash told us he wanted to go back to Iran it was the dramatic starting point to make this film. We had quite a short span of time – two weeks – to make the movie before he left for Iran, so I gave it a certain structure and decided to have a road movie, but I didn't have any script. I had an idea of the situation, of the things and themes I'd like to talk about. I arranged, for example, the meeting with the two girls, but then what happens in the scenes, is all real, it's their thing. I had no dialogues – some ideas, some structure, but a lot of real things happened.

How were you able to disappear so completely in the filming, especially in such small spaces like the car and in these very personal encounters with the two girls?

I wouldn't say I was completely absent. The camera is sort of a character in the film. So we have five characters in the film, with the two girls. So there's one scene where they play with the camera when Charlotte and Ashkan are together, where Ashkan tells her he prefers her playing guitar to drums and she gets angry. Then she sort of overdoes her anger, she plays it up more than she really feels, which gives me material to work with, with the storytelling. So they have not forgotten the camera because we have been filming for three years, but it became an additional element in the film that helped it to develop.

And you plan to make another film with your three main characters in Iran?

I definitely want to work with them because they were not professional actors but after these three or four years of shooting they have become actors and it would be a shame not to use this potential in a sequel. I also know that these three main characters are very different in their home country than in France so I want to work with this – that we are different when we are in our homelands and that we become different when we leave it for somewhere else. I would like to see them in this context where they become new actors, or different. ■



Filmmaker Maryam Goormaghtigh has been filming her Iranian friends for three years.



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