

INVERSION

(VAROONEGI)

A film by
Behnam Behzadi



Colour, 2K, 1:1.85, 84 min, 2016, Iran



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SYNOPSIS

Niloofar, 35 years old, lives alone in Tehran with her aged mother, and stays busy with her tailoring shop.

Tehran's air pollution has reached maximum levels because of thermal inversion (when warm air settles over cool air, preventing pollutants escaping) making it hard to breath. When doctors insist that her mother must leave smoggy Tehran for her respiratory health, Niloofar's older brother Farhad and her sister decide that she must also move away to the countryside to accompany her mother.

Niloofar is torn between family loyalty and living her own life and pursuing a potential love interest that she has kept secret from her family. She is the youngest and she has always succumbed to family pressure, but this time she decides to stand up for herself.

INVERSION premiered in Un Certain Regard, Cannes 2016.



Further information and downloads www.newwavefilms

CAST

Niloofar
Farhad
Soheil
Soudabeh
Homa
Mother/Mahin
Saba
Majid
Reza
Dr. Rahnama
Mohseni
Arash

Sahar Dowlatshahi
Ali Mosaffa
Ali Reza Aghakhani
Setareh Pesyani
Roya Javidnia
Shirin Yazdanbakhsh
Setareh Hosseini
Toufan Mehrdadian
Mojtaba Nam Nabat
Payam Yazdani
Ebad Karimi
Yazdan Akhoondi

CREW

Director & Scriptwriter
Script Advisor
Director of Photography
Sound
Sound Design & Mix
Music
Editor
Make Up Artist
Set and Costume Designer
Assistant Director
Still Photography
Production Manager
Investors
Producer

Behnam Behzadi
Hassan Shahsavari
Bahram Badakhshani
Rashid Daneshmand
Amir Hossein Ghasemi
Sahar Sakhaei
Meysam Molaei
Soudabeh Khosravi
Babak Karimi Tari
Afshin Rezaei
Somayeh Jafari
Ebrahim Zahedifar
Behnam Behzadi, Mojtaba Nam Nabat
Behnam Behzadi

Colour, 2K, 1:1.85, 16:9, 84 min, 2016, Iran



BEHNAM BEHZADI

Born in 1972, Behnam Behzadi started his career as a photographer and theatre actor at the age of 15. He graduated from the Faculty of Cinema and TV in Tehran with a BA in filmmaking. He has made more than 20 films including shorts, TV movies and documentaries, some of which won various awards in international film festivals, especially his first feature, *Before the Burial* in 2008. His previous film, *Bending the Rules* won the Special Jury Prize in Tokyo, the Audience Award in Nantes and the Special Prize in Mannheim. Behzadi teaches Cinema at the Tehran University of the Arts and has published many articles and essays. *Inversion* is the first of his films to be released in the UK.

FILMOGRAPHY

Feature Films

2016 INVERSION (VAROONEGI)

2013 BENDING THE RULES (aka THE RULE OF ACCIDENT) (GHAEDEYE TASADOF)

2008 BEFORE THE BURIAL (aka WE ONLY LIVE TWICE) (TANHA DO BAR ZENDEGI MIKONIM)

Short films

1987 GRANDFATHER

1991 TO DIE

1993 TODAY IS MONDAY

1999 RETALIATION

2000 FATHER'S TALES

Documentaries

1988 ASHURA

1994 THE FACULTY

1995 HAND AND MOANING

1997 THE BLUE ECHO OF THE TILE

2002 HIDE YOUR WORDS

2005 SWAN SONG

Film for Television

1996 THE FIRST DAY

2001 ADDRESS

2003 WE WENT TO THE RIVERBANK

2006 GLASS AVERSION

2009 BEYOND TRILOGY

2010 ANOTHER PERSON

2011 SECOND HEART

Director's notes

Tehran

Tehran is one of the most polluted cities in the world, and the pollution reaches its peak on the days when there is thermal inversion. On such days, the situation becomes critical and it is even hard to breathe. We all notice the air pollution only on such days but we forget it after a few days. In fact, we don't forget it, we get used to it. We get used to it because if we work or live in this city or like this city for any reason, we do not have another choice. And we got used to not having a choice.

Niloofer in my story is one of the people in this city; someone who has never had the right or the chance to choose, and she has got used to not having them. Now she needs the inversion to remind herself and the others to respect her pleasant right to choose.

Her choice, like anybody else's, might be wrong or costly, but what matters to her is that she feels she has the right to choose; rights that she may not want to use, but it is only when you lack something that you realize its importance. And to get it, you are willing to lose anything.

Origin of the Project

A few years ago, during one of the polluted days in Tehran, I saw a young girl who, like many other people, was wearing a mask on her nose and mouth, and was walking on the pavement. When she passed by me, I noticed she was sobbing. Her tears had wet a large part of her mask. Only her big bloodshot and tearful eyes could be seen, and she was oblivious to her surroundings. When she passed by me, the first thing that came to my mind was that, maybe more than as a solution to the air pollution, she was using the blue mask to protect herself against the reproachful gaze of the society that scolded the young girl for displaying her emotions in public. Maybe she had hidden a large part of her face behind the mask to be able to pour out her feelings. Maybe she was practicing to get her share from the street, city, and society. Maybe she was a sign. Now, after a few years, her image is still vivid in my mind. An image that stayed with me in a smoke-filled day in Tehran became the starting point of this film.



Family

Iranian society is in a difficult twisty path between tradition and modernity, and it tries hard to pass and resists obstinately to remain in this duality. As the smallest unit of society, the family can be a model and example of a society with all its characteristics. I have always wondered if what goes on in our familial relations and between us individually is the reproduction of what is going on in its larger model - society - or conversely, humans - after the elevation of their positions and their effectiveness - exert the same beliefs and behaviour they have in their individual and familial circles to society and give form to it. Whatever the answer, the result is the same; their models are very close. However, the new generation of Iranians - and especially women - are constantly striving to change their status and role and go beyond the framework set for them. Higher education, acquisition of new knowledge, working, and financial independence play a significant role, and the statistics indicate their fast and unprecedented growth. With such an approach, they do not submit to the past models, and they try to gain new rights and positions even if traditions, beliefs and the law act against them.

A Slice of Life

Some of my role models in cinema are those who have opened new ways and presented different forms of filmmaking and of relating a story. I teach classic models of scriptwriting and cinema to my students in university, and I tell them each time how they can go beyond those models and make their own films. One of my serious yet enjoyable goals in filmmaking is the reduction or change in the familiar models. This is what I have tried to do in *Inversion*. Few people around me have experienced a calamity or a disaster, but I don't know anybody who has not undergone change in one or another phase of their life. When I see such people, I ask myself every time if I can make a film that, instead of using the classic model of screenplay with the disastrous event and big turning points, would be close to life and at the same time have an interesting story and theme to attract the audience. Bearing that in mind, from the first sentences of the screenplay to the last moments of the film, I tried to discard or reduce whatever was making the film too theatrical, in order to invite the audience to watch a slice of life itself. Therefore, I chose a certain form of directing and visual storytelling that like the other elements of the film, has its own function, without drawing much attention to itself. During the directing of the film, although I was tempted to employ the familiar model of a realistic film, a specifically documentary-like image, I tried to place the audience in the scene like a viewer, to the extent that they forget the camera, get close to the characters, and are in the centre of the film's atmosphere. I reduced its cinematic structure to the simplest possible. Thus, despite the many sequences and the immobility of the camera, the film would have a real and even improvised feeling. *Inversion* is a 'mood' film for me since the beginning; the mood of Niloofar, the people around her, and the crowded smoke-covered city of Tehran. I hope the mood will be conveyed to the audience.

Working with the Actors

For directors like me, who have used non-actors in almost all of my previous films, working with several professional actors was a new experience, an exciting and wonderful experience. During the casting, the actors were chosen very quickly. Sahar Dolatshahi was the first choice for the role of Niloofar. She might be less known to the audience outside Iran, but in Iran, she is one of the best and most renowned theatre and cinema actresses and she has worked with many great names. I have known her for many years ago and I had seen her performances in theatre and cinema, but I got to know her rare talents and abilities when she merged with this role and turned into Niloofar. During those days, we spent a lot of time with Sahar to review what Niloofar liked, including her favourite music. I found out later that during production, she listened only to Niloofar's favourite music, and it was a part of her method to get close to the role.

I talked to Ali Mosaffa about the role of Farhad when I was writing the screenplay. During two decades of playing in Iranian cinema, he has worked with almost every big name. He was recently seen in *The Past* by Asghar Farhadi. He is also a scriptwriter, director, and producer, and his films have gained much attention and achievements inside and outside Iran. Farhad in *Inversion* is in a way the opposite of the characters of Ali Mosaffa in most of the roles I had seen him in, and it was a challenging and interesting issue for both of us. Ali, however, is a very intelligent and professional actor. For me, he is the personification of acting, that is of 'being' instead of 'acting'. This is what I expect from my actors and Ali does it best.

Iranian Cinema

Cinema has a strange and exceptional situation in Iran. A few thousand short and documentary films and nearly 250 feature films are made every year. A large part of these films are mainstream and a small portion belongs to the independent art or experimental cinema. A few of those enter the international festival and distribution circuit: this cinema is still alive and active. Probably Iran is one of the few countries where you can still see long queues at cinemas, audience-packed halls, midnight screenings, and of course the enormous excitement and passion of the young audience.

In a corner of this cinema and outside the frenzy of production and screenings, there is Iran's independent cinema, where people like me make their films with their personal investment or the small financial support outside the governmental and studio system, and some international independent companies distribute them. Although my experience in the independent cinema has been associated with the back-breaking hardship of making every film and moving towards the next film, I am glad that I have been able to follow my personal trend without becoming dependent.

During the past few decades, the Iranian cultural and independent cinema has luckily reached a status which means that today, even the experimental and elite cinema of Iran have found their fans both inside and outside Iran, and have own place in the cycle of production and distribution.

Sahar Dowlatshahi as Nilofar



Sahar Dowlatshahi is one of Iran's most popular new actresses.

She recently won her country's coveted Simorgh Award (Fajr Festival) for her performance in Mostafa Kiyayee's ICE AGE. She was also honored by the Iranian critics.

She made her screen debut in Asghar Farhadi's 2006 film FIREWORKS WEDNESDAY, and has since appeared in over 15 films, including directors such as Abbas Kiarostami (SHIRIN), Bahram Tavakoli (THE SHALLOW YELLOW SKY), Kiarash Asadzadeh (GAP), Morteza Farshbaf (MOURNING), Homayoun Asadian (GOLD AND COPPER) and Behnam Behzadi (INVERSION).

Born in 1979, Sahar Dolatshahi is also an accomplished television and theatre actress. Since she began her career in 2002, she has played in more than 20 plays, many of Iran's most acclaimed productions.

ALI MOSAFFA as Farhad



Ali Mosaffa (b.1966, Tehran, Iran) started his film career as an actor in 1991: he earned strong reviews for his work in Dariush Mehrjui's PARI (1995) for which he was awarded Best Supporting Actor at Iran's prestigious Fajr Festival, then further acclaim for that director's LEILA (1998), which introduced him to his future wife and collaborator, Leila Hatami. Since then he has acted in many Iranian films including Asghar Farhadi's French-language film THE PAST. He made his feature debut as writer-director with the prize-winning film, PORTRAIT OF A LADY FAR AWAY (2005). His 2012 film THE LAST STEP was an acclaimed winner at Karlovy Vary - FIPRESCI Prize and Best Actress (for Leila Hatami).

He began producing films in 2012 with THE LAST STEP and also WHAT'S THE TIME IN YOUR WORLD (dir. Safi Yazdani), which won the FIPRESCI Prize in Busan 2014.