

Shipham Community Cinema

presents

The Salesman (12A)

Director: Asghar Farhadi

Oscar®-winning Iranian director Asghar Farhadi (*A Separation*, *The Past*) returns with a masterclass in complex moral questioning as a couple has to deal with a sudden violent act. Forced to move apartments quickly when their building almost crumbles, married actors Emad (Shahab Hosseini) and Rana (Taraneh Alidoosti) hastily move into a new flat loaned by a friend, not knowing that its previous occupant has left more than just furniture behind and this legacy proves highly dangerous for Rana. Dealing with the aftermath of trauma, the couple find that a hunger for justice creates its own cracks.



A beautifully observed, painstakingly crafted study on the power of pride, guilt and shame, Cannes saw *The Salesman* deservedly pick up awards for both Best Actor and Best Screenplay. With the US President's ban on visitors from seven Muslim-majority countries including Iran, Farhadi has said he wouldn't travel to the Oscars® (where *The Salesman* won for Best Foreign Film) even if he got special dispensation, in solidarity with those already affected.

This interview by Elise Nakhnikian with Asghar Farhadi originally appeared on slantmagazine.com on 23 Jan 2017.

Your films provide a humanistic window into life in Iran, partly because the characters are so easy to relate to and partly because of their sheer artfulness and moral complexity. Do you think they help counteract the dominant narrative in countries like ours, that tend to portray Iran as a scary, dangerous place full of religious and political extremists?

When I make my films, I'm not consciously thinking that I want to show a correct image of my people to the world, but automatically this happens, and this satisfies me. The situations that characters are put into in these films are situations that could happen anywhere in the world. The look that I have onto the characters is a look of empathy—even the characters who are at fault. Perhaps this is something that people around the world like, when you can put yourself into the shoes of others. This is the most important thing to me.

Censorship has been famously difficult for some Iranian directors, most notably Jafar Panahi. The way you make the audience think for themselves about what is happening is one of the signature features of all of your films, and I've always assumed it was an artistic choice. But are you saying you developed that way of making films in part to avoid being censored?

I believe art in the face of censorship is like water in the face of stone. When you place an obstacle like a stone in the way of water, the water finds its way around it. This doesn't mean agreeing with censorship, of course. But one of the things that censorship does, without wanting to do it—one of the unintended consequences—is that it makes you creative. Censorship in the long run has very bad consequences, and it can kill creativity, but in the short run it could make people creative.

How does censorship work in Iran, exactly? I understand it's not like there are clear rules you have to follow, but more of a shifting landscape, depending on who you're dealing with?

Censorship has different shapes. There's an official censorship: There's a committee that reads your script and gives you comments. Those people, throughout the years, because they have become familiar with cinema through watching films, they have become more lenient. But there's also an unofficial censorship. When the film is finished and screened, then people who look at everything with a political eye take their magnifying glass and look into the details. They look for the things that might be against them, and they start to make some interpretations of the film that have nothing to do with the film. And this damages the relationship that the ordinary audience has with the film and it manipulates their minds.

How widely are your films seen in Iran?

Out of my films in Iran, this film has been the most successful. It's still in the last days of its screening in Iran, and it has been the best-selling film in the history of Iranian cinema.



Taraneh Alidoosti, who plays Rana, also played main characters in several other films of yours. What is it about her, or your working relationship with her, that works so well for you?

This was my fourth film with Taraneh: she's a very smart actress, and she uses her mind when she's facing a character. She's one of those actors that must understand the character fully. In this film, she had a difficult task because in most of the film, Rana was silent because of the damage that was done to her.

The job of Taraneh was to make the character be silent not because she's passive but because she's been damaged.

You're so good at capturing the perspective of women in your films. How much of the oppression that women experience do you think comes from seemingly nice guys like Emad, whose male pride makes him blind to the trauma Rana experiences after her attack, and how much from overtly misogynistic or domineering men?

The men in my films, in regular situations, are just normal men. When they're placed in a crisis, all of a sudden their characters change. This is exactly my deliberate choice. I choose male characters that are placed in dilemmas, and they cannot make a decision when they are in these dilemmas. Usually these men are good men who try to be moralistic, but the situations don't allow them to execute their moralism. Also, men usually think about the past more than women. Women, because of their ability to give birth to children, look to the future more. Women can pass easier.

Notes courtesy of The Watershed

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME:

Announcements

Trailers for Film Stars Don't Die In Liverpool - our main feature on 11th May

Sondheim's Follies - our extra show on 25th May

Death Of Stalin - our main feature on 8th June

Main feature (124 mins) with a break after about 65 minutes

We welcome your feedback. Tell us what you thought of the show on our Facebook page, by email to cinema@shiphamhall.co.uk or by filling out a feedback form, (hand it to any committee member). Our usual many thanks to our sponsors:

