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3 Faces (15)

Dir: Jafar Panahi

Starring: Behnaz Jafari, Jafar Panahi

Sponsor: Richard and Linda Hall

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Synopsis: Despairing that her ambition to be an actress has been frustrated by her family, Marziyeh Rezaei records a video on her phone of her apparent suicide, and has it sent to the director Jafar Panahi, with instructions that it be passed on to the famous actress Behnaz Jafari. Panahi and Jafari then set out on a trip into mountainous Azerbaijan to verify if the suicide took place. Approaching the village of Saran, they encounter an eccentric signalling system on the narrow one-way road. The villagers, at first excited by the arrival of the glamorous Jafari, are soon disappointed that the urban visitors have not come to remedy their water and electricity problems. Panahi and Jafari are given a hostile reception by Marziyeh's brother who believes the family has been shamed by her wanting to be an actress and her enrolment at a conservatory in Tehran. Marziyeh has even agreed to an engagement, in the belief that her family would allow her to attend the conservatory. Marziyeh has now been missing for 3 days, but Panahi and Jafari are still unsure about her suicide. Village elders tell them about an actress, Shahrzad, a star of the pre-revolutionary cinema, who now lives as a shunned outsider near the village. Marziyeh, it turns out, has been sheltering with Shahrzad and although Jafari is furious at the deception, Marziyeh protests that the suicide ploy was the only way to get Jafari to come to Saran to help her. One old man presents Jafari with the preserved foreskin of his eldest son, believing that in passing it on to a famous film star will guarantee the son's good fortune. An attempt to take Marziyeh home results in another fight with her brother. As Panahi and Jafari leave the village the next day, Jafari walks ahead; Marziyeh runs up to join her.

3 Faces is the fourth film made by the Iranian director Jafar Panahi since in 2010, he was banned from making any films for 20 years and given a six-year prison sentence for indulging in "propaganda against the Islamic Republic". That run of films is remarkable in itself as an act of resistance and a mocking riposte to the theft of artistic freedom. But the four now constitute something of their own genre with themes and motifs to connect them other than the fact that they're not supposed to be there.

The major motif of course is Panahi himself, and the underlying theme of his predicament as a filmmaker exiled within his own country. In the second instalment, *Closed Curtain* (2013) the theme became darkest, as it broached the possibility of suicide as an end to exile. With *Taxi Tehran* (2015), Panahi found a kind of way out, casting himself as someone who conducts others through Tehran's streets - though the limitations to this picaresque realism were that you can show what's "real but not *real* real", as one character puts it. This, it might be said, is the dilemma of addressing and portraying life in Iran - one that has confronted Panahi and others, including his mentor and collaborator Abbas Kiarostami.

3 Faces pushes in another direction, mentioning Panahi's political plight but letting it hang somewhere in the background. In the foreground are the stories of three women - a young would-be actress, Marziyeh, (Marziyeh Razaei); a much fêted star of screen



and TV, (playing herself); and a now forgotten and isolated actress, Shahrzad, "who sang and danced in films before the Revolution". Shahrzad is presumably the third face, though it is never seen: she is only ever a distant figure, watched at the end by Panahi as she paints (which has now become her calling) in a field.

Cultural and political attitudes impinge on the lives of all three: Marziyeh has secured a place as a conservatory in Tehran but her family prevents her going, and Jafari's celebrity coexists with a deeply rooted prejudice against "entertainers". What connects the three - and initiates an odyssey to Iran's mountainous northwest - is a video selfie we see at the beginning which the despairing Marziyeh has taken of her own suicide by hanging. This she wants to be shown to Jafari, and has sent it via Panahi; the two then set off for Marziyeh's remote village of Saran (not far from Mianeh, Panahi's own birthplace in Azerbaijan).

On the way, Jafari begins to doubt whether the suicide actually happened ("I get the impression the shot of her fall at the end is edited"), and questions how the video was passed on after her apparent death. Panahi chimes in with the professional filmmaker's opinion ("I don't see any cut. Only a real pro could do such an edit") and declares, "It all looks real to me." This might be of a piece with the self-consciousness within all Panahi's films (such as the little girl who seems to abandon the role she has been given in *The Mirror*, only to jump into a different role), except that the argument here about the technicalities of Marziyeh's selfie doesn't really amount to the same kind of self-reflexive play and only serves to spin out the plot complications.

In effect, Panahi has abdicated his central role to give room to a tripartite portrait of his actresses that has wider social implications. Not that there isn't real affection in the room he allows to the male villagers who rhapsodize about their prize mating bull, or the old old man who treasures the preserved foreskin of his eldest son. But then there's the communal magic of the silhouette shot of the three women dancing together at night in Shahrzad's tiny cottage. "This is what I'm trying to change in Iranian Society," Panahi has said, speaking of his interest in the role of women. He focuses the interest close to home here, when Jafari reports on a conversation she has had with Shahrzad, the former star: "She's angry at the whole world. Especially directors she's worked with."

Credits

Behnaz Jafari	Herself
Jafar Panahi	Himself
Marziyeh Rezaei	Herself
Maedeh	Maedeh Erteghaei
Mother	Narges Del Aram
Old woman in the grave	Fatemeh Ismailhejad
Yadollah	Yadollah Dadashmejad
Karbalaei	Ahmad Naderi Mehr
Old man in the road	Hassan Mihammadi
Marziyeh's brother	Mehdi Panahi
Cow owner	Asghar Astani
Shahzad	Herself
Director	Jafar Panahi
Screenplay	Jafar Panahi
Local dialogues	Nader Saeivar
Director of Photography	Amin Jafari
Editing	Mastaneh Mohajer
Set design	Leila Naghdi
Sound	Amineza Alavian
Costume	Leila Naghdi

Iran 2018. 100 mins

Another View

Iranian writer/director Jafar Panahi obviously isn't a man to let a 20-year state sanctioned filmmaking ban cramp his style. This latest offering is the fourth feature he's turned out under legal restrictions imposed when he was found guilty of 'propaganda against the Islamic Republic'.

Still, it's clear from the films themselves that he's now on a slightly longer leash: where 2011's *This Is Not a Film* and 2013's *Closed Curtain* were personal reflections on living under house arrest, shooting 2015's *Taxi Tehran* in and around a cab negotiating the bustling capital showed a certain freedom of movement, and *3 Faces* now takes the form of an extended road trip to the far north west.

With its broader geographical canvas, *3 Faces* is in many ways the most outward-looking of those recent films, focusing strongly on the right of women to seek acting opportunities despite disapproval from conservative family members. That conflict is so strong that the whole film opens with mobile phone footage of a young woman who's about to kill herself because her parents won't let her follow her dreams.

The images were sent to one of Iran's most famous actresses, Behnaz Jafari, who has asked Panahi to drive her to the girl's home village (pointedly mentioned in the clip) and discover whether the whole ruse is a cry for help, or she has actually done the fatal deed. Jafari, with striking red hair peeking out from under her scarf, is a regular on Iranian TV screens and hence recognised everywhere she goes, though she has also worked in film with the likes of Abbas Kiarostami and Samira Makhmalbaf.

As the two wind up in the remote mountains, Jafari at first seems somewhat aggravated to have left a shoot because of some self-dramatising teen, but eventually the bitter irony that the villagers treat her like royalty while assuming that the local lass's ambitions to take up acting will doubtless end up in prostitution kicks in.

Effective as an opening teaser, the suicide scenario only dramatically sustains the film so far, and when the ball does finally drop, *3 Faces* thereafter turns into something of an observational doc as the filmy types try hard not to patronise the rough-hewn yokels with their deep-set traditional ways.

It's watchable enough, and if Panahi's political message about the need to question sexist oppression perpetrated

unthinkingly in the name of religion hits the target, his somewhat functional style has little of the mystery or poetry that his late mentor Kiarostami showed in rural-set films such as 1997's *Taste of Cherry* and 1999's *The Wind Will Carry Us*. That said, while the film's tendency to meander does it few favours, there's a certain defiance which strikes a nerve when we get to the third face hinted at by the title – here living as a virtual outcast is a star actress from pre-Islamic Revolution days. Panahi respects her wish to remain off-screen, which only highlights her current status as a non-person, but even so the inference that she has found a life for herself as painter and poet offers an affirmative indication that life goes on... even without state approval.

Trevor Johnston: Little White Lies

Our next screening: Friday February 4th, 7.30pm Rafiki (Kenya 2018. Cert 12a)

We follow a film made by a banned film maker with a film banned altogether. *Rafiki* is our first Kenyan film, a gentle story about 2 young women who find that a mutual attraction between them grows into a romance, to the disapproval of everyone they know. When it first appeared, the Government immediately banned it from being shown in the country because of its "homosexual theme and clear intent to promote lesbianism in Kenya contrary to the law", and announced that anyone caught in possession of the film would be in breach of the law and faced the possibility of 14 years in jail.

Director Wanuri Kahiu sued the Government which led to the ban being lifted and allowed the film to be shown publicly long enough to qualify as Kenya's official entry to the 2019 Oscars. The film also appeared at Cannes 2019 in *Un Certain Regard*. *This screening is preceded by Back in My Day, a short film made by James Foster, a digital designer and videographer graduate of the University of Lincoln and member of The Venue staff.*

Programme News

We'd like to thank members for their support for our screening of *Imperfect Age* by turning up in such numbers and for all the comments. Here's a further reminder that this year's Indie Lincs festival runs at the LPAC from February 13-15. Full details are available here: <https://www.indie-lincs.com/2020-festival>

This weekend offers the last chance to vote for our classic film this season. Don't forget to quote your membership number when voting; without it, your vote won't count.

Suggestions are being taken for films to go onto our long list for next season. Members can let us know in person or email the Society at filminlincoln@gmail.com