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Exclusive interview with Bahman Farmanara

July 21/2011

A rare screening of "Tall Shadows of the Wind" at Tirgan



One of the best treats the Tirgan Iranian Festival has in store this year is the Canadian rare screening of Bahman Farmanara's epic 'Tall Shadows of the Wind.' Even better is the chance to be a part of a Question and Answer period featuring the legendary artist himself after the screening.

Produced 34 years ago in Iran, the film has been fenced with controversy and censorship by Iranian officials before and after the 1979 Iranian revolution, which makes this screening that much more significant.

Salam Toronto was honored to have received an interview with Mr. Farmanara, where topics such as the current status of Iran's film industry as well as his latest works were discussed:

Salam Toronto (S.T.): Your film titled 'Tall Shadows of the Wind' will be screening on July 23rd at the Tirgan Festival in Toronto. How do you analyze the film today, 34 years after it was produced?

Bahman Farmanara (B.F.): 'TALL SHADOWS OF THE WIND (SAYEHAYE BOLANDE BAAD)' was finished one year before the 1357 (1979) Iranian revolution and when we sent it to Ministry of Culture and Art of that time, it was banned by the reason that we were told that the scarecrow represents Shah and SAVAK. After the revolution, the film received an 'A PERMIT', which was the highest level of screening permit that they could give to a film. But after three days of the screening, the film was banned for the same reason that it was banned before the revolution. Now they said, by the scarecrow you mean the Islamic regime and her secret service. As far as I am concerned the film still is very relevant, because it still deals with ICONS that we the people have made ourselves.

S.T.: What is your opinion of the Iranian cinema industry at the present?

B.F.: The situation of Iranian Cinema is absolutely dismal at the present time, since the people who are in charge of managing the industry from the government side, they're bad filmmakers, who are worse in their management capabilities. Still there is such a large pool of talent in our country that people like Asghar Farhadi still appear. The fact that television in Iran is spending millions of dollars every year to make mediocre or bad TELE-FILMS is planned to force most directors to work with television.

S.T.: What is the situation of current Iranian artists in the field of cinema?

B.F.: The people that work in cinema in Iran have a great deal of financial difficulties, especially during the last couple of years. The Deputy Minister in charge of Cinema refuses to give the funds allocated for the HOUSE OF CINEMA, which represents the whole body of cinema including different guilds. Everyone is donating money so that they can pay the salary for employees.

S.T.: What have you been working on lately?

B.F.: Last year I made a documentary about PARVIZ YAHAGHI called 'THE CANCELLED CONCERT,' which was broadcasted from BBC PERSIAN, and presently [I'm] making another documentary called 'SIMIN BEHBAHANI, OUR MOTHER COURAGE.' I also have a project to be shot totally in Berlin, called 'A JOURNEY INTO DARKNESS,' if finally the budget of the film is put together.

S.T.: What do you wish for today?

B.F.: My only wish is FREEDOM and TRUE DEMOCRACY in IRAN.

Bahman Farmanara's Biography:

Bahman Farmanara is a writer director actor producer and film distributor to say the least. He was born on January 23

Farmanara is a writer, director, actor, producer, and film distributor to say the least. He was born on January 29, 1942 in Tehran, Iran and is the second son in a family of four brothers and one sister. He graduated in 1966 from University of Southern California with a BA in Cinema.

After returning to Iran and completing military service, he joined the National Iranian Radio and Television department and during his six years of work, produced and anchored over 150 programs, eventually directing 'Prince Ehtjab,' his second feature film that won the Grand Prix for Best Film at the third International Tehran Film Festival in 1974. During three years acting as Head of Film Division at the Film Industry Development Company of Iran (FIDCI) he produced five feature films. After leaving FIDCI, he directed and produced 'Tall Shadows of the Wind.' The film was banned in Iran during the Shah's reign. Two years after the Islamic revolution, the film was banned again and taken off the screens after a three-day run. After this incident, he left Iran with his wife and three children for Canada on November 1980.

Shortly after his arrival, in 1982, The Vancouver International Festival of Films for Children and Young Adults opened and Farmanara was its founder and Managing Director. During this time, he also established the film distributor Grosvenor Film Company. The company's success led to finding investors in Toronto to start another company called Spectra Film with offices in Toronto and New York City. He has worked with icons of the film industry including Martin Scorsese, Oliver Stone, and Paul Newman.

Farmanara eventually returned to Iran to help his brother, who had had a heart attack, to run the family textile company. During the first ten years of his return, he was not allowed to make films and instead, devoted himself to teaching and running the family business.

The year 2000 when he was allowed to make his first film in 20 years and thus wrote, directed and played the lead in 'Smell of Camphor, Fragrance of Jasmine,' which won eight awards at the Fajr International Film Festival: best film, best director and best screenplay. The film went on to win the Special Jury Prize at the Montreal International Film Festival, and was also screened at the New York Film Festival. In 2002 he wrote, produced and directed 'A House Built on Water,' which also won five awards at Fajr International Film Festival, including the best film.

His current film, 'Earthbound (KHAK-ASHNA),' is in post-production and according to his website, will be ready by mid-December.

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