



PREVIEWS & EVENTS

3 Faces (Se rokh)

We are screening this film and There Is No Evil (Sheytan vojud nadarad) in solidarity with Jafar Panahi, Mohammad Rasoulof and Mostafa Aleahmad. The BFI strongly condemns their prison sentence and the oppression of artists in Iran.

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 *rea/real*’, as one character put 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 Rezaei); a much fêted star of screen and TV, Behnaz Jafari (playing herself); and a now forgotten and isolated actress, Shahrzad, ‘who danced and sang in films before the revolution’. Shahrzad’s 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 at 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 north-west – 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 it sent 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 rhapsodise about their prize mating bull, or the 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 am 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 shunned former star: 'She's angry at the whole world. Especially directors she worked with.'

Richard Combs, *Sight & Sound*, April 2019

Social networks are extremely popular in Iran, with many people yearning to connect with film celebrities. Despite being forbidden to make movies in his own country, Jafar Panahi remains a very popular recipient of messages, many from young people who want to make films. While he usually deletes them, sometimes he is touched by a sincerity, an intensity, that has led him to wonder more about those who send him these messages. One day he received a message on Instagram that raised his concern, and during the same period the newspapers wrote about a young girl who had committed suicide because she had been banned from making movies. This made him imagine receiving a video of this suicide by social media, and he wondered how he would react to that. This is how the story of *3 Faces* was born.

Jafar Panahi wanted to look back at Iranian cinema history and explore what has hindered its artists, in different ways, at different times. Hence the idea of evoking three generations, those of past, present and future, through the three characters of the actresses. Out of composing these three stories came the image of this narrow and winding road, which is a concrete metaphor for all the limitations that prevent people from living and evolving. The winding road needed for the script actually exists, even if today it is no longer used. Cars generally take another road, wider and paved.

The *3 Faces* shoot took place in three villages: the birthplaces of Panahi's mother, father and grandparents. Such a familiar and protective environment greatly facilitated the possibility of filming without risk. Using a very sensitive camera sent by his daughter who lives in France, he was even able to work outdoors at night without the need for heavy equipment. As always, Panahi wrote the entire script. Filming outdoors was a much welcomed change after his previous movies (*This Is Not a Film*, *Closed Curtain*, *Taxi Tehran*), which confined him to interiors – an apartment, a house, a car. The three villages used in the shoot are located in the northwest of Iran, in the Azeri speaking part of Iran, where people in the countryside are particularly attached to local traditions, with some aspects still very archaic. The attitude of the inhabitants in the film is consistent with what is still happening in this region.

Notes by Jean-Michel Frodon, *New Wave Films* pressbook

3 FACES (SE ROKH)

Director: Jafar Panahi
Producer: Jafar Panahi
Line Producer: Nader Saeivar
Post-production: Pooya Abbasian
Script: Jafar Panahi
Local Dialogues: Nader Saeivar
Photography Supervisor: Amin Jafari
1st Assistant Camera: Reza Sepehri
Visual Effects: Hamed Musavi
Edit: Mastaneh Mohajer
Editing Assistant: Panah Panahi
Set Design: Leila Naghdi
Costume Design: Leila Naghdi
Make-up Design: Leila Naghdi
Duduk Player: Yusef Moharamian
Sound Design: Amireza Alavian
Sound Recordist: Abdolreza Heydari
Sound Editor: Amireza Alavian

Cast

Behnaz Jafari (*Behnaz Jafari*)
Jafar Panahi (*Jafar Panahi*)
Marziyeh Rezaei (*Marziyeh Rezaei*)
Maedeh Erteghaei (*Maedeh*)
Narges Del Aram (*mother*)
Fatemeh Ismaeilnejad (*old woman in the grave*)
Yadollah Dadashnejad (*Yadollah*)
Ahmad Naderi Mehr (*Karbalaei*)
Hassan Mihammadi (*old man in the road*)
Mehdi Panahi (*Marziyeh's brother*)
Asghar Aslani (*cow owner*)
Kobra Saeedi (*Shahrazad, poetry reciter*)

Iran 2018
101 mins

Courtesy of New Wave Films

NEW RELEASES

Hit the Road (Jaddeh Khaki) Continues from Fri 29 Jul
Conscientious Protectors From Mon 1 Aug
The Feast From Fri 19 Aug
My Old School From Fri 19 Aug
Where Is Anne Frank From Fri 19 Aug
Queen of Glory From Fri 28 Aug

RE-RELEASES

The Big City (Mahanagar) Continues from Fri 22 Jul
Paris, Texas Continues from Fri 29 Jul
The Harder They Come From Fri 5 Aug
Burning an Illusion From Fri 19 Aug

EVENTS & REGULAR PROGRAMME

Art in the Making: 12 Views of Kensal House + intro by Steven Foxon, BFI Curator (Non-Fiction)
Thu 18 Aug 18:30
Relaxed Screening: Kes + intro + discussion
Mon 22 Aug 18:15
Woman With a Movie Camera Preview: Queen of Glory
Mon 22 Aug 18:30
Terror Vision: Burnt Offerings
Thu 25 Aug 18:10
TV Preview: Am I Being Unreasonable? + Q&A with writer/actors Daisy May Cooper, Selin Hizli and exec producer Jack Thorne
Wed 31 Aug 18:15

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