UK Premiere of 4K Restoration

Bashu, the Little Stranger

+ intro by film curator Ehsan Khoshbakht

Jafar Panahi: Maestro Bahram Beyzaie is not only a filmmaker in the Iranian tradition. He is a writer, a scholar, and an artist who has made an unrivalled contribution in reviving the legends, stories, and mythology of Greater Iran and the Persianate world.

[*Bashu, the Little Stranger*] narrates the story of a little boy struck by war, who takes refuge in another region. Throughout his journey, the story of coexistence and acceptance of The Other takes form. It carries a message that was not only relevant to the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s, but is also vital for our world today: a world that is still full of resentment, displacement, and violence, where instead of dialogue and understanding, warmongers and those hungry for power keep adding fuel to the fire of prejudice and ignorance.

For many years, this film was banned from screening in Iran, simply because it was a work of art that was honest, humanistic, and anti-war; in the same way that Beyzaie himself was pushed into exile instead of being allowed to create art in his own country. Such is the common fate of all artists faced with regimes that not only have no appreciation for the arts, but are intrinsically against art and against culture. Nevertheless, exile could not silence Beyzaie. His work continues to reveal the truth and keep our collective cultural memory alive.

The screening of this restored copy of *Bashu, the Little Stranger* not only pays tribute to a cinematic masterpiece; it is also a reminder that art at any time, in any place, awakens human consciousness and shows us humane paths through friendship, coexistence, and peace.

Mohammad Rasoulof: The encounter of human differences, within a thoroughly Iranian story and told with a universal expression, is exactly what Bahram Beyzaie brings us face to face with in *Bashu, the Little Stranger*.

Even today, nearly 40 years after the film was made, its universal expression remains striking. For an Iranian audience, the meeting of two characters with different languages, skin colours, and cultures – one from the lush, mountainous north of Iran and the other from the hot, arid southwest – is a deeply local narrative. Yet this very story, infused with the mysteries of Iranian culture, creates a universal and powerful concept of cultural diversity and the authenticity of human relationships, and – against the backdrop of war – lays bare the futility of all violence.

At a time when, under the heavy hand of censorship, women in Iranian cinema were either absent or portrayed as passive, the film's heroine is a beautiful woman (brought to life in a brilliant performance by Susan Taslimi) who, as a compassionate yet strong-willed mother, rejects discrimination and violence.

The film was made in the midst of the bloody war between Iran and its western neighbour, Iraq – a time when filmmakers were called upon, as an Islamic duty, to produce part of the government's propaganda content to justify and prolong the war. Films were meant to stir the emotions of audiences and lead them into a senseless battle in which, on both sides, combatants shouted 'Allahu Akbar' as they pointed the way to paradise.

Bashu, the Little Stranger
Bashu, Gharibeh-ye Kuchak
Director: Bahram Beyzaie
Production Company: Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young People
Producer: Ali Reza Zarrin
Production Manager: Mahvash Sheikholeslami
Screenplay: Bahram Beyzaie
Director of Photography: Firouz Malekzadeh
Stills Photography: Shahaboddin Adel
Special Effects: Ali Asghar Mirzai
Editor: Bahram Beyzaie
Art Director: Iraj Raminfar
Make-up: Farhang Moayeri
Music Selected by: Bahram Beyzaie
Sound Recording: Jahangir Mirshekari, Asghar Shahverdi, Behrouz Moavenian
Cast:
Susan Taslimi *(Nai)*
Adnan Afravian *(Bashu)*
Parviz Poorhosseini *(Nai's husband)*
Akbar Doodkar *(Marhamat)*
Hamid Rahbar *(Marhamat's son)*
Iran 1986
120 mins
Digital 4K (restoration)

Restoration in 4K at Roashana Studios with the support of the Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (KANOON). Presented by mk2 Films.

This screening is dedicated to the memory of Bahram Beyzaie, who died last December.

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Regular Programme

Experimenta: Sound and Vision: Films by Helen Petts + Helen Petts in conversation with musician Steve Beresford
Wed 15 Jul 18:15
Silent Cinema: UK premiere of 4K restoration: 3 Bad Men + intro by Bryony Dixon, Rosie Taylor and Makeda Doyal
Sun 19 Jul 15:10
Seniors: After Hours + intro
Mon 20 Jul 14:00
Woman with a Movie Camera: Blue Black Permanent + intro by filmmaker Beth Johnston
Thu 23 Jul 18:20
Film Wallahs: Hamlet
Sat 25 Jul 15:00
Relaxed Screening: Trains! + intro and discussion
Mon 27 Jul 18:15

Re-releases

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Continues from Fri 5 Jun
The Girls Gehenu Lamai
From Fri 10 Jul
Nostalgia Nostalghia
From Fri 24 Jul

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Yet Beyzaie, with great effort and keen intelligence, made the film he wanted to make, though it remained banned for many years.

Now, four decades later, with Bashu having become an unforgettable character in Iranian cinema, one can see more clearly than ever how Beyzaie transforms the cinema screen into a window carved from the history and literature of Iran, opening it onto a beautiful and spectacular world.

Amir Naderi: Bahram Beyzaie is rightfully known as the greatest playwright in the history of Iran and remains forever one of the most important filmmakers. With the films he has made, he holds a great place in Iranian cinema, both before and after the Revolution. Especially this extraordinary film of his, *Bashu, the Little Stranger*, which is a product of filmmaking by the Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults and contains a message that is everlasting.

The style of the film and its way of storytelling are extraordinary, and it is fitting to say that the cinematography of this film is the work of one of the greatest cinematographers in the history of Iranian cinema, Firouz Malekzadeh.

Shahram Mokri: *Bashu, the Little Stranger* is not merely a film for me; it is an image etched into the memory of my childhood. In those days when the sky over my city was filled with the wail of sirens and the thud of bombs, I sat in the darkness of a small cinema, watching a boy escape from the heart of war to another land. Bashu, with his unfamiliar accent and his presence so foreign to that place, felt at once known and distant to me – much like myself, a child growing up between fear and dreams. Perhaps it was there, without my knowing, that the seed of my dream to become a filmmaker was planted – a dream that, years later, would lead me behind the camera to tell my own stories.

In this film, Bahram Beyzaie told not only the story of a small refugee, but our own story: the story of displacement, the search for a home, and the meaning of friendship. His gaze upon war, upon women, upon the land and its languages, became for our generation – raised in smoke and rubble – a lesson in humanity and compassion.

Years have passed, yet each time I return to *Bashu*, I feel that Beyzaie is not merely a director, but a teacher who has reminded us, through images, that a homeland is not only the place where we are born. A homeland is where someone takes your hand and says: ‘Stay.’

mk2 Films