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Tehran Taxi
(Iran 2015)

DIRECTOR : Jafar Panahi
RUNNING TIME : 82mins
RATING : Documentary

Synopsis:

Banned Iranian director Jafar Panahi takes to the streets of Tehran in a taxi with his camera secreted on the cab's dashboard. Winner of the Golden Bear Berlin Film Festival 2015

Review:Jonathan Romney

Much loose talk is bandied around in the film world about directors' bravery and the heroism of "guerrilla" film-making – but those terms genuinely mean something when applied to Iran's Jafar Panahi. After making several robust realist dramas about the challenges of everyday life in his country – among them *The Circle*, *Crimson Gold* and the exuberantly angry football movie *Offside* – Panahi fell foul of the Iranian government, which threatened him with imprisonment, prevented him from travelling and banned him from making films for 20 years. He has protested by working under the wire to make three extraordinary works, contraband statements that are at once a cri de coeur from internal exile, and a bring-it-on raised fist of defiance.

This Is Not a Film (2011, directed with Mojtaba Mirtahmasb) showed Panahi cooling his heels under house arrest in his Tehran flat, and evoking the film that he would have made had he been allowed to pick up a camera. He wasn't technically making an actual film, Panahi argued – yet he was manifestly making one anyway, as the world saw when the result was smuggled to Cannes on a USB stick hidden in a cake. However, the less successful *Closed Curtain* (2013, directed with Kambuzia Partovi) was a claustrophobically self-referential chamber piece, and suggested that Panahi's plight was getting the better of him.

However, his survivor spirit and delight in cinema's possibilities have endured, and re-emerge to sparkling effect in *Taxi Tehran*. For this spare, witty exercise, Panahi rigged a taxi with three hidden video cameras and surreptitiously filmed a drive round Tehran, with himself at the wheel ferrying assorted passengers – presumably actors for the most part. One assumes that everything is staged; such is the feel of brisk spontaneity that it's hard to tell.

Cont.

FILMS IN THE SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS INC

10.00 am Sunday 20th November 2016

8.15 pm Tuesday 22nd November 2016

Review: (cont.)

The first two passengers are a man who grumbles about tyre thieves, and proposes to hang them all, and a woman who objects that Iran hardly needs more executions. Brusquely, the man tries to silence her – “Law and sharia have spoken... so chill out, lady” – before exiting with a comment that casts ironic light on his self-righteousness. Eventually revealed in the driving seat, Panahi himself is soon recognised by another fare, who suspects that he’s shooting a film, and that the previous passengers were actors. Things now get pretty self-reflexive: a short, stout customer identifies himself as Omid the DVD bootlegger. He’s the man who keeps Tehran supplied with Woody Allen and *The Walking Dead*, but he’s also probably local viewers’ only conduit to Panahi’s own work; this Danny DeVito-like character may be a bumptious clown, but he’s a genuine hero of samizdat distribution.

As passengers come and go, the most telling section involves Panahi’s young niece Hana (played by herself), an aspiring film-maker in her own right. Her schoolteacher wants her to shoot something “distributable”, but in Iran that involves certain criteria – including the avoidance of “sordid realism”. Hana films a street boy as he pockets some money accidentally dropped by a bridegroom; she then imperiously beckons him over to the cab to berate him, as he has made her project undistributable by causing her to shoot an episode of sordid realism.

Later, Panahi gives a ride to a woman who’s going to visit a hunger striker in prison; the passenger isn’t named, but she is a real-life figure, human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh, who reminds Panahi that they themselves have both been on hunger strike in the past. Sotoudeh strikes the film’s most optimistic note when she extends a rose to the camera, and implicitly to the world audience, “because the people of cinema can be relied on”. The film concludes on a dark, abrupt note, but Sotoudeh’s gesture of hope and goodwill resonates above and beyond the ending.

Taxi Tehran may not be artistically groundbreaking – the film is partly a nod to Panahi’s compatriot Abbas Kiarostami and his pioneering in-car drama of 2002, *Ten*. But Panahi has made a work of invention and brio that remains visually lively throughout, despite its formal restrictions. There are no end titles. Panahi has recently had to be cautious about crediting collaborators, for their own safety; but this time he notes, in a sardonically piquant closing caption, that he can’t name anyone because Iran’s ministry of culture and Islamic guidance only approves the credits of distributable films.

Heaven knows how long Panahi can continue to make films in this way, but his latest outing raises the spirits no end. Reviewing *This Is Not a Film* in 2012, the great Philip French commented, “There is unlikely to be a wittier, braver, more serious film shown in Britain this year.” Three years on, exactly the same can be said about Panahi’s latest. I don’t know whether Philip ever got to see *Taxi Tehran*, but I think he would have relished this expression of faith in the act of film-making as a vital and joyous undertaking.

Source: www.theguardian.com Jonathan Romney 1/11/2015 edited extracts - accessed 4/1/16

Some Thoughts On: *Tanna*

I enjoyed this excursion on so many levels, it was such a different journey in film.

The story line or narrative was not particularly special as the star-crossed, doomed lovers is a common theme in storytelling spanning thousands of years and the vast majority of cultures, but I loved being so completely immersed in a way of life that I knew absolutely nothing about. I loved the rich humanity of it as all the traits of our species emerged in this Pacific microcosm of the world at large. There were the lovers, the fighters, those that were vengeful, those that were forgiving, the peacemakers, leaders, followers and the love of family and fears for the future all taking place in a beautifully rich and nurturing environment which was also vulnerable to climate change and neglect. The full range of 'us' was there.

A beautiful land of rich and stunning contrasts captured gorgeously by the cinematographer was just such a treat for the eye. I was amazed at how naturally the cast performed in front of camera given their very limited exposure to such technologies in the past. The children in particular were nothing short of amazing. That this film was depicting events that had taken place in the relatively recent past was a testament to the isolation of these conflicted tribes even though Vanuatu in general and Tanna in particular, have been growing tourist destinations for years. Astounding.

It was just wonderful to be so 'transported' for one and a half hours by this very special revelation of a very different world, but one that was so familiar, or at least common to us, too. Oh, and by the way, they really do worship Prince Philip over there. Extraordinary ~ perhaps it's the Kava!! Ross Armfield.

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**Your membership card is non-transferable
Please see President's Message**

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COMING UP:

December	<i>Alex & Eve</i> (Australia)	Sunday 11 th & Tuesday 13 th
February '17	<i>The Nightingale</i> (China)	Sunday 12 th & Tuesday 14 th
March	<i>A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence</i>	Sunday 26 th & Tuesday 28 th
April	<i>Truman</i> (Spain/ Argentina)	Sunday 30 th & Tuesday May 2 nd
May	<i>Macadam Stories</i> (France)	Sunday 28 th & Tuesday 30 th
June	<i>Labyrinth of Lies</i> (Germany)	Sunday 25 th & Tuesday 27 th

Message from the President

OK, let's get the gripe out of the way to begin with. It has come to our attention that some members are playing fast and loose with their membership cards, allowing others, (non-members), to view our films, mainly at the second screenings. This card is for financial members ONLY and is not transferable to friends, neighbours, relatives or anyone else. Our system is based on trust. We realise that with 400 odd members we cannot recognise everyone at the door when all we ask for is a showing of the card as proof of current membership and entitlement to enter the cinema. Obviously and unfortunately, this tiny percentage of members exercising the fraud realise that too. We were going to introduce photo ID, fingerprint matching and DNA sampling as the way to establish proof of legitimate card possession, but that was narrowly defeated in a torrid committee vote many years ago. Time to revisit the issue? No, we shall stick with our current system and hope that the offenders can see the error of their ways, and that what they are doing is dishonest, a breach of trust, a type of theft and ultimately, just plain pathetic.

On a lighter note, many of you may not be aware but a few weeks back, the Empire was voted the best regional cinema in Australia for 2016 by AIDA, (Aust. Independent Distributors Assoc.), beating around 150 rivals nationwide. This is a wonderful achievement and honour, so richly deserved. Congratulations Richard, Gerard, Dave, James, Penny, Jess, Barb and the whole team. Mind you, the news that they are now 'officially' wonderful is hardly surprising to anyone living in the Southern Highlands, we've known it for years!

Right now we are lining up some special treats for our December screenings of *Alex & Eve*. One of those treats will be cool and yummy as the Christmas spirit starts seeping into your committee. It should be a fun year-closer, we hope you can all make it at a very busy and often hectic time of year.

Once again we were in a position to support CanAssist with their fundraising screening at the Empire recently. It is a privilege to help these wonderful volunteers in their continuing work of providing medicines and pharmaceuticals to long term cancer patients in the Southern Highlands. Thank you to all who attended that screening of *The Light Between The Oceans*.

We have what looks like some great films to conclude our season next year. Look for them elsewhere in the newsletter and enter them in your diary now. There are some real beauties. Meanwhile, in deep contrast to *Tanna*, we proudly present *Tehran Taxi* for this month ~ another film with some reputation attached and once more I can't wait. I hope you feel the same way,
Yours in film. Ross Armfield



FILMS IN THE SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS INC

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