



Shirin Neshat and Shoja Azari's "Women Without Men" is an eye-opening film to Iran (1953) but also a film that tries to show viewers how Iran used to have a democracy at one point in time and how much freedom women also had long ago. Thanks to the artistic influence of photographer and visual artist turned director, Shirin Neshat and co-director Shoja Azari, they were able to bring in a good balance of politics and art which work harmoniously together and in essence, a film that is moving and also visually captivating. "Women Without Men" is recommended!

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DVD INFORMATION

DVD TITLE: Women Without Men

DATE OF FILM RELEASE: 2009

DURATION: 95 Minutes

DVD INFORMATION: Color, 2:35:1, Dolby Digital 2.0 Stereo, Farsi with English Subtitles

COMPANY: INDIEPIX

RATED: NOT RATED

RELEASE DATE: September 25, 2012

DVD PRODUCTION CREDITS

Directed by Shirin Neshat, Shoja Azari

Written by Shoja Azari

Screenplay by Shirin Neshat

Based on the Novel by Shahrnosh Parsipour

Produced by Philippe Bober, Martin Gschlacht, Susanne Marian

Executive Producer: Jerome de Noirmont, Barbara Gladstone

Associate Producer: Shoja Azari, Oleg Kokhan

Line Producer: Peter Hermann, Erwin M. Schmidt

Music by Ryuichi Sakamoto

Cinematography by Martin Gschlacht

Edited by George Cragg, Patrick Lambertz, Jay Rabinowitz, Christof Schertenleib, Julia Wiedwald

Casting by Lisa Olah, Markus Schleinzer

Production Design by Shahram Karimi, Katharina Woppermann

Costume Design by Thomas Olah

Starring:

Shabnam Toloui as Munis

Pegah Ferydoni as Faezeh

Arita Shahrzad as Farrokhlagha

Orsola Toth as Zarin

Mehdi Moinzadeh as Sarhang

Essa Zahir as Amir Khan

A J!-ENT DVD REVIEW

WOMEN WITHOUT MEN is Shirin Neshat's independent film adaptation of Shahrnush Parsipur's magic realist novel. The story chronicles the intertwining lives of four Iranian women during the summer of 1953; a cataclysmic moment in Iranian history when an American led, British backed coup d'état brought down the democratically elected Prime Minister, Mohammad Mossadegh, and reinstalled the Shah to power.

For many Americans, especially today, we often don't understand why certain countries have strained relations. Some look at cultural differences, religious differences but when it comes to the United States and Iran, many will look towards history and see 1953 as a year that the relationship between Iran and the United States to change and 50-years-later, tension between the countries continue.

For those who grew up during that time, after the United States and Britain assisted Mohammad-Reza Shah in the overthrow of Prime Minister of Iran Mohammad Mosaddegh and to allow the country to be under a military government led by General Fazlollah Zahedi.

For many, it was the end of democracy. Many will engage in debates about foreign involvement with the 1953 Iranian coup d'état but many would feel that the interest for foreign powers was over oil, which at the time, the United States depended on 60% of oil coming from Iran.

The Prime Minister who felt that the oil was Iranian property wanted to protect the country's oil and Britain retaliated by preventing oil to be exported from Iran to other countries which led to CIA carrying out a coup as an "act of U.S. foreign policy, conceived and approved at the highest level of government".

Because of this, there was an exodus of Iranians and those who were not in the country were exiled.

For famous photographer and filmmaker Shirin Neshat, she was studying at a university in California during the revolution and was unable to return to visit her family. But as an Iranian and also now an American, she has a perspective from both countries along with co-writer/co-director Shoja Azari ("Logic of the Birds", "Windows").

Both worked on a loose adaptation of Shahrnush Parsipur's 1990 novel "Women Without Men", a novel that was banned by the Iranian government and because of her literary work, she was imprisoned four different times (which she would write about in 1994 in her memoir, "Prison Memoire").

For the film adaptation, the goal for both filmmakers was not to polemicize the coup but to show how Iran looked when it was under a democracy. How people lived differently than people of today pre-193, some who pursued the arts and culture, music and decor but a lot has changed since then. Also, because Shirin Neshat is an artist, to bring some of her influence to the film, especially with the various shots that are featured in the film.

The film would follow the lives of four women and feature their lives during the Iranian Revolution of 1953. Because the film could not be shot in Iran, it was shot in Turkey and actors were cast in Europe. The film was banned from Iran but was a winner of a Silver Lion at the 2009 "Venice Film Festival" for "Best Director" and also the winner of the "UNICEF Award", also receiving a nomination for a "Golden Lion" award.

"Women Without Men" was screened at film festivals all around the world and now, the film will be released on DVD courtesy of IndiePix.

"Women Without Men" would begin with a young woman in her late twenties named Munis (portrayed by Shabnam Toloui), a woman that is being arranged by her brother Amir to meet with a suitor. But she has no interest in marriage. She is more interested in listening to the news on the radio in regards to current events and what Britain and America are doing to their country.

But it leads to tension because Amir feels his sister is not interested in getting married and wanting to become single (which is an embarrassment for him as her older brother). And in anger, he rips apart the television cord, and threatens her that he will beat her if she doesn't meet with the man.

Meanwhile her good friend Faezeh (portrayed by Pegah Ferydoni) wonders why Munis is so interested in what is happening with the politics, especially those who are involved in outdoor strikes against the Shah.

Faezeh is also there to visit Munis because she is in love with Amir, who happens to be engaged to marry another woman.

Upset by Amir forcing her to marry, Munis goes up the top of their building and jumps off to kill herself. She is found by both Faezeh and her brother Amir and is buried.

Meanwhile, we are introduced to Zarin (portrayed by Orsolya Toth), a person who does not speak and is a prostitute who looks emotionless and severely depressed of her current lifestyle. She is different from the others and is often alone. One day, she heads off to a nearby orchard and goes to a lake where she tries to drown herself.

We are then introduced to Farrokhlagha (portrayed by Aria Shahrzad), a singer and a disenchanted wife of a general who is sickened by her marriage to the man, who took another wife because his wife no longer pleases him. She makes the decision of leaving her husband and her old lifestyle to live in the quiet orchard, where she and the orchard worker discover Zarin unconscious in the lake.

As both try to bring Zarin back to life, back at the home of Faezeh, she is preparing to attend Amir's wedding.

While there and walking outside, she hears Munis calling out her name from the ground. Faezeh digs her out and frees Munis from her burial, but instead of going home, Munis rather hang out at the coffee shop to listen to the news on the radio about what is happening in their country. Faezeh not wanting to be near the people who go on strike, leaves by herself, not knowing that two men have left the coffee shop to pursue her.

When Munis goes outside to look for her friend, she sees Faezeh crying and finds out that she was raped. Feeling shamed and not wanting to return back home, Munis takes Faezeh to the orchard and tells her to stay there, as the people there will help her. But for now, she must go to Tehran.

As Faezeh goes into the orchard, she meets Farrokhlagha and Zarin and eventually befriends them and heals overtime.

Meanwhile, Munis ends up becoming an activist and sides with the communist who are protesting against the Shah.

But as even are nearing mid-August of the successful coup d'etat against Prime Minister of Iran Mohammad Mosaddegh, how will life affect these four women?

The DVD Breakdown

VIDEO & AUDIO:

"Women Without Men" is presented in 2:35:1 aspect ratio and in Farsi Dolby Digital 2.0 with English subtitles. Thanks to Shirin Neshat, famed photographer and visual artist turned director who brings her style and creativity as director by working with cinematographer Martin Gschlacht ("Revanche", "Lourdes", "Breathing") and getting the shot that she wanted in the film.

The cinematography is beautiful, the composition of the film is creative and artistic and I was captivated by the overall look of the film. While the film looks good on DVD, if IndiePix ever releases titles on Blu-ray, I do hope they consider releasing "Women Without Men" on Blu-ray in the future.

SPECIAL FEATURES:

"Women Without Men" comes with the following special features:

- **Behind the Scenes** – (21:44) The behind-the-scenes making of "Women Without Men" narrated by Shirin Neshat.
- **Walker Art Center Q&A** - (48:08) Post-screening Q&A with Shirin Neshat and Shoja Azari.
- **Theatrical Trailer** – (1:51) Theatrical trailer for "Women Without Men".
- **Shirin Neshat Video Compilation** - (3:28) A video compilation of Shirin Neshat's work.
- **Slideshows: Production of Women Without Men** – Photos from "Women Without Men"
- **Slideshows: The Art of Shirin Neshat** - Slideshow of Shirin Neshat's photography work.
- **Trailers for Other IndiePix Titles**

EXTRAS:

"Women Without Men" comes with a 12-page booklet which features an interview with Shirin Neshat and a political and historical background of what happened in Iran back in 1953. The film also comes with a slipcover.

Judgment Call

"Women Without Men" is an eye-opener and a film that works on a variety of levels.

For one, any American not familiar with the US and Iran conflict will probably be surprised about what happened in Iran in 1953. How Iran pre-1953 was a country that believed in democracy, people could live freely and women had a choice to dress what they want, leave their husbands if they want. People embraced culture, art, music, etc.

But because of the coup d'etat led by Britain and the United States for the sake of oil production, the United States partook in a propaganda campaign to have Prime Minister of Iran Mohammad Mosaddegh removed and bringing in the Shah and new leader General Fazlollah Zahedi, to rule Iran with an iron fist and for the most part, it was the end of democracy for many Iranians.

While the film doesn't delve too much into the politics or conflict, it does try to showcase an Iran pre-1953 and how people were free. Not knowing that their country would soon change with a military government and it would be the end of democracy for the country.

The four characters are from different parts of the society, showing women as independent.

Munis is a woman who is not as traditional as her religious brother who wants and is forcing her to get married, while she wants to remain independent and become an activist.

Faezeh was very traditional but when she is raped, knowing that her life will never be the same, she gets a taste of freedom away from her traditional life with singer Farrokhlagha.

Farrokhlagha is a talented singer and wife to a general, who is disenchanted with her marriage, her husband having another wife for sexual needs and disgusted by her husband,

chooses to leave her life and her husband to live at an orchard.

While Zarin is a woman who is a prostitute and disenchanted with her own life because of the life she is living.

And I would imagine the title of the film would related to each of these women who are without men and have been used, abused or mistreated by men in someway.

But it's how their lives change in 1953, as we see these women with and without their chador. A time where women had more freedom and the lifestyle enjoyed by people that we don't see today. And that was one of the primary focuses by the filmmakers and that is to show how Iran once was for society but also women.

The other example of how this film works on another level is thanks to Shirin Neshat, famed photographer and visual artist who brings her style and creativity as director, working alongside cinematographer Martin Gschlacht ("Revanche", "Lourdes", "Breathing") and getting the shot that she had wanted in the film. The cinematography is beautiful, the composition of the film is artistic and I was captivated by the overall look of the film.

The film also featured legendary Japanese musician/composer Ryuichi Sakamoto composing a few tracks on the film, but instead of an ongoing musical score throughout the film, Shirin Neshat wanted more use of natural sounds.

All this was done with a shoestring budget and for the most part, Shirin Neshat and Shoja Azari were able to craft a wonderful film that balances politics and art without being too pretentious nor does the film preach about which side is right or who is wrong.

There is no doubt that Shirin Neshat and working with writer Shahrnough Parsipour, that with both living in the United States, there are freedoms that they have in America, but being Iranian, there is a side (especially for Shirin) that is somewhat bittersweet because it is a film about Iran, but yet the film is banned from being shown in Iran, because the film features a freedom of Iran's past, how women were treated in Iran 1953 and how certain liberties and freedom died when democracy was replaced.

And for any cineaste who loves to do their research of history, you learn that America was a big part of that change and one of the reasons why tensions between the two countries exist today.

As for the DVD, "Women Without Men" is one of the better IndiePix DVD releases I have reviewed. There are a few special features including a Q&A and making of, a booklet is included with a special case.

Overall, Shirin Neshat and Shoja Azari's "Women Without Men" is an eye-opening film to Iran (1953) but also a film that tries to show viewers how Iran used to have a democracy at one point in time and how much freedom women also had long ago. Thanks to the artistic influence of photographer and visual artist turned director, Shirin Neshat and co-director Shoja Azari, they were able to bring in a good balance of politics and art which work harmoniously together and in essence, a film that is moving and also visually captivating.

"Women Without Men" is recommended!

J!-ENT RATING



Ratings are based on overall package with most consideration on the movie/series or documentary. And then figuring in PQ, AQ and special features/extras and releases with special packaging.

- ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ *Excellent! - Must Buy!*
- ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ *Very good!*
- ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ *Average at Best!*
- ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ *Lost Potential - Rent it!*
- ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ *Major Suckage!*

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