



## Sundance 2011: Circumstance – Movie Review

By Mali Elfman

There were a number of films at [Sundance](#) that took on the subject of homosexuality and the un-accepting nature of the societies around them. For me, *Circumstance* was the most successful of the bunch. Maybe because the stakes felt the highest, maybe because of the expert craftsmanship that went into creating and executing the project, or perhaps it has something to do with the locations in which it was shot — but one thing is for sure, this is a great film that deserves to be acknowledged...

Though this film is an American made film, the film was shot mainly in location in Iran and you will need to be prepared to read some subtitles (don't worry you can do it and there's enough sexy nudity to make up for it). The location of this film was everything, it told you the culture, the people, the politics— and then broke any preconceived notions you might have had and showed you the reality of what it's like, specifically for these two women.

This film plays with cliches and then breaks them. From the older generations being more open minded than the younger, to the way that Iranian women are looked at, to the struggles of being in their position, to women lashing out — this film is not what you would expect when you see “lesbian Iranian lesbian story.” It’s fast-paced, honest, colorful — this is not your cliched “indie” with slow scenes and innuendos, this is a bold film from a bold story teller.

There were a number of situations in which you will be surprised as to what exactly goes on behind closed doors. Though homophobia is a worldwide epidemic, there’s no doubt that you could feel the pressure from both the people and government pressing down on them. With everything against them, holding them down, they had to find ways to act out and fight back. There was more sex, nudity, drugs, dancing and the lot in this film than many others and rightly so. You can only repress a person so far before they need to break out and this film does just that.

And taking the film to yet another level were the performances. Though the women in this film were wonderful and had the most to do both emotionally and physically, the man who plays the father, Soheil Parsa, steals just about every scene he is in. He’s so subtle and yet you know everything he’s going through. Surprisingly through it all, he’s the one who will pull your hearstrings, because he is fighting for what is actually right, but he just can’t make a difference. He’ll do anything to keep his family together and happy. He’s truly the do-gooder and the moral compass of the film... which is a nice change from the norm in a film like this.

### Overall:

First time director Maryam had a very definitive style of shooting which is something you really look for at Sundance. A number of newbies make films with potential, but they need some time to get to their real style of filmmaking. In this film Maryam comes out of the corner swinging. From the camera style, to the brilliant use of music and dance, to the colors and movement— she makes a strong statement as to who she is as a director and gives us a lot to be excited for in the future.

Luckily this film did in fact get picked up, so hopefully it will be in theaters later this year. The longer I think about it the more it resonates with me, I can’t seem to get it out of my head. It’s a great pick, beautiful and fun, and yet meaningful and deep — don’t miss it!