



'Circumstance' looks inside Iranian youth culture

by Calvin Wilson

Atafeh (Nikohl Boosheri) and Shireen (Sarah Kazemy) are young women in love — with each other. Their romance is something to be cherished, but also something to be hidden. It could get them killed.

As Iranians, Atafeh and Shireen know that certain things are not allowed. Both fantasize about moving to Dubai, where they would be free to do all the things that Americans take for granted — such as wearing skimpy and sexually provocative clothing — but that Iranians must do in secret. Even the underground clubs are constantly under threat of being discovered by morality police.

Adding to Atafeh's discomfort is the return of her brother Mehran (Reza Sixo Shafai), a former drug addict who is fast becoming a religious fanatic. The change in his behavior is all the more alarming because their family is, by Iranian standards, somewhat progressive.

It all comes down to an unfortunate turn of events that irrevocably alters the relationship between Atafeh and Shireen.

Written and directed by Maryam Keshavarz, "Circumstance" offers an inside look at Iran in all its cultural complexity. While the film has an air of authenticity, it's also slickly shot (by Brian Rigney Hubbard), and its theme of youth rebellion has the potential to resonate with moviegoers who might otherwise have little interest in tales of political repression.

Unlike the work of Iranian directors Abbas Kiarostami ("Taste of Cherry") and Jafar Panahi ("Offside"), "Circumstance" seems designed to cross over to the mainstream. Boosheri and Kazemy, while wholly believable as the main characters, wouldn't be out of place in a music video. The camera loves them, and the film's more erotic scenes definitely take advantage of that.

"Circumstance" was made, reportedly with some difficulty, in Lebanon. Shooting it in Iran would have been far too dangerous.