

Festival de Cannes 2009 - Un Certain Regard

# **NO ONE KNOWS ABOUT PERSIAN CATS**

Ein Film von  
**Bahman Ghobadi**

Mit  
**Negar Shaghghi, Ashkan Koshanejad,  
Hamed Behdad**

Dauer: 107 min.

Kinostart: 1. Juli 2010

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PRESSE

prochaine ag • Susanne Hefti  
Mythenquai 355 • 8038 Zürich  
Tel. 044 488 44 25  
[susanne.hefti@prochaine.ch](mailto:susanne.hefti@prochaine.ch)

VERLEIH

FRENETIC FILMS AG  
Bachstrasse 9 • 8038 Zürich  
Tél. 044 488 44 00 • Fax 044 488 44 11  
[mail@frenetic.ch](mailto:mail@frenetic.ch) • [www.frenetic.ch](http://www.frenetic.ch)

## SYNOPSIS

Nachdem sie aus dem Gefängnis entlassen werden, beschliessen Negar und Ashkan, zwei junge iranische Musiker, eine Untergrundband zu gründen. Unfähig sich in ihrem Land frei zu bewegen versuchen die beiden, heimlich Ausweispapiere zu besorgen, um nach Europa auszureisen.

Sie treffen Hamed, der sie in ihrem Vorhaben unterstützt. Zusammen mit ihm streifen sie durch Teheran, und versuchen weitere Musiker davon zu überzeugen, das Land mit ihnen zu verlassen. Um ihre Flucht zu finanzieren, organisieren sie ein illegales Konzert.

## CAST

Regie ..... Bahman Ghobadi  
Buch ..... Bahman Ghobadi, Roxana Saberi, Hossein M. Abkenar  
Kamera ..... Turaj Aslani  
Montage ..... Hayedeh Safiyari  
Ton ..... Nezamodin Kiaie  
Schnitt ..... Bahman Ardalan  
Regieassistentz ..... Mehdi Pourmousa, Sepehr Mikailian  
Produktion ..... Mij-Film

## **INTERVIEW WITH BAHMAN GHOBADI**

### **Why did you adopt such a different style and tone from your earlier films?**

In this film, I tried to approach the rhythm and dynamism of life in Tehran, hectic as it is. I wanted to show the city from a different angle. The music and particularly the lyrics of the songs influenced the rhythm of the film.

### **This was the first time you've shot in a city, let alone Tehran. Why did you leave Kurdistan?**

I'd already shot several short films in the town of my birth, Baneh. I wanted to shoot this one in Tehran for a number of reasons. Many people told me I should film nowhere but Kurdistan, while the Iranian government and film community accused me of being a Kurd separatist - which is truly stupid! I simply hadn't needed to shoot in towns. Recently I had a project set in Tehran entitled '60 Seconds About Us'. I spent two years preparing to direct the film only to be denied authorization to shoot. Two years of my life lost. So I bought a SI2K camera in order to avoid having to depend on the State, as all 35mm equipment belongs to them and you need shooting authorization to hire it. As soon as I bought this camera, I wanted to try it out. I met a group of underground musicians and was very drawn to their passion. And thus, for three weeks, I filmed them, without a break, and without authorization...

### **Music and musicians play an important role in most of your films: where does this passion of yours stem from? Are you a musician yourself?**

I adore music. Had I not become a filmmaker I would have been a musician or a singer for sure. I can play kobeyi, and my friends tell me my voice isn't too bad! In fact, I'm currently recording my first album.

### **This is the first time in Iranian cinema that anyone has dared denounce the severity with which the State treats the antiestablishment youth. You're taking a big risk handling such a subject in Iran. How did the filming go?**

I was very apprehensive during the filming. We had no permission. The scouting was done using two or three motorbikes and we began filming without any real preparation. The scenes had to be shot at high speed, so the police couldn't spot us. For the scene where David is arrested, we had to transform an ordinary car into a police car, buy police uniforms and alter them to fit the actors. I feel as if I aged 17 months during the 17-day shoot. These were terrible conditions in which to make a movie!

### **Do you think this film could be released in Iran?**

I'm 100% sure this film won't be released in Iran. In fact it's more than likely that my colleagues will face certain problems. My previous film was censored and the DVD available only on the black market. Whether the film is released or not changes nothing for me as A TIME FOR DRUNKEN HORSES and TURTLES CAN FLY screened in a single cinema for 10 or 15 days maximum! Isn't that absurd?

### **Where did the idea for this film come from?**

I was sad and disheartened because my last film had been censored and because I couldn't obtain permission for my next project. My fiancée, Roxana Saberi, tried to console me and advised me to make a film about the situation in which I found myself. At the same time I was recording in a studio without authorization. That's where I met Askan and Négar (the two leads in the film) and little by little I was able to enter into their life and their world... At the beginning there was no script, but that didn't prevent me from shooting them with a small crew. Then, with my friend Hossein, we wrote a script and improvised on it every day. During the shoot, the police arrested us twice, which lost us two days. But thanks to gifts (DVDs of my earlier films), they let us go. We had no choice but to lie. We told them, for example, that we were making a film about drugs and so forth. They insisted on seeing identification and we had to call a particular friend to sort things out.

### **What is the significance of the title?**

We don't have the right to take out either dogs or cats. However, in our homes we have cats we love very much, and besides, Persian cats are very expensive. I compare them to the young protagonists of my film, without liberty and forced into hiding in order to play their music. What's more, when I visited the musicians' homes, I noticed that the cats liked to stand in front of the amps and listen!

## **DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT**

In the eyes of Islam, music (ghéna) is impure, giving rise as it can to cheerfulness and joy. Hearing a woman singing is considered a sin, because of the emotions it stirs...

For the last 30 years in Iran, certain music, and in particular western music, has been virtually forbidden by the authorities. It has been forced into hiding underground: it must be played underground and listened to underground! Even if this music has been hidden, it has not disappeared as a result. In all these years, few have dared acknowledge it. This intrigued me, and the idea for the film was born.

Cinema gave me the courage to make NO ONE KNOWS ABOUT PERSIAN CATS. From the moment I ventured into the heart of Tehran and descended the dark steps into the cellars where this music is played, I discovered a strange world, different and fascinating. A hidden world of rebel musicians, unseen and unheard by the majority of the city's population. And as I witnessed their world, their lives, their artistic concerns, the dangers they face, troubles with their neighbors, arrest by the police, savage beatings and more... when I saw all they go through simply because they sing, play an instrument, love music... I said to myself that this film had to be made.

NO ONE KNOWS ABOUT PERSIAN CATS is the first true depiction of the reality of these young musicians.

## **DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY**

Bahman Ghobadi was born on February 1<sup>st</sup>, 1969, in Baneh, a city near the Iran-Iraq border, in the province of Kurdistan, Iran. After receiving his high school diploma from Sanandaj, he moved to Tehran in 1992 to further his studies.

Ghobadi began his artistic career in the field of industrial photography. Although he earned a B.A. in Film Directing from the Iranian Broadcasting College, he never properly graduated, believing that he learned more by making short films than by formal study. His direct experience with film helped him to expand his individualistic voice and his vision of the world he inhabited. He initially used 8mm film, shooting short documentaries as a starting point.

From the mid-1990s on, Ghobadi's short films began to receive foreign and domestic awards. LIFE IN FOG ("the most famous documentary ever made in the history of Iranian cinema") in particular was the recipient of a number of international prizes and opened new opportunities in Ghobadi's career. With the making of his debut feature, A TIME FOR DRUNKEN HORSES in 1999, Ghobadi became fully recognized as an international director. The first full-length Kurdish feature film in the history of Iranian cinema, it firmly established Ghobadi as the leading Kurdish director from Iran.

- 2009 NO ONE KNOWS ABOUT PERSIAN CATS  
Cannes Film Festival, 2009  
Un Certain Regard
- 2006 HALF MOON  
San Sebastian Film Festival, 2006  
Winner - Golden Seashell and Best Cinematography Award
- 2004 TURTLES CAN FLY  
San Sebastian Film Festival, 2004  
Winner - Golden Seashell and CEC Best Film Award
- 2003 DAF (short)
- 2002 MAROONED IN IRAQ  
Cannes Film Festival, 2002  
Un Certain Regard
- 2000 A TIME FOR DRUNKEN HORSES  
Cannes Film Festival, 2000  
Winner - Camera d'Or and Fipresci Prize
- 1999 LIFE IN FOG (short)