



Film reveals 'Circumstance' of gays in Iran

By James Verniere / Boston Herald
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What is it like to be gay in Iran, where President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad claims homosexuality does not exist?

Part of the answer can be found in "Circumstance," an unusually liberated look at lesbian lovers and classmates from Iranian-American writer-director Maryam Keshavarz.

Beneath their head scarves and long overcoats, Keshavarz's heroines Shireen (Sarah Kazemy) and Atafeh (Nikohl Boosheri) often wear sexy dresses and high heels and are ready to party at secret locations ("sewing class"), where young people can listen to hip-hop, drink alcohol, dance and more. Their greatest fear: the Morality Police.

At home, Atafeh, an as-piring singer and wonderful dancer, lives peacefully with her parents, wealthy doctors from well-to-do families. Her brother Mehran (Reza Sixo Safai) is a musician and recovering drug addict who's about to turn religious fanatic.

Shireen's parents were liberal professors who were either exiled or executed by the government. She lives with her well-to-do uncle and grandmother.

When they aren't watching bootlegged episodes of "Sex and the City," Shireen and Atafeh secretly dream of fleeing to Dubai, where "anything is possible," including shooting a sequel to "Sex and the City." But in the meantime, they find themselves in trouble with the law for their wanton ways.

"Circumstance" is a fascinating depiction of life among the young and the well-to-do in present-day Iran. The film takes a decidedly "The Lives of Others" turn when the increasingly fanatical and inquisitorial Mehran plants secret cameras to keep an eye on Shireen and his sister, whose relationship drives him nearly over the edge.

What is most noteworthy about the film outside of the chemistry of the leads, sexually suggestive scenes and numerous lyrical images of fingers touching and intertwined, are the glimpses of secondary things. In one case, we watch as two gay men, friends of Shireen and Atafeh, try to dub "Milk" for young Iranian viewers. The scene is surprisingly funny, especially when one of the men dubbing the voices is asked to "sound more gay" in Farsi.