

# WALL STREET JOURNAL



## REVIEW: 'Circumstance'

By John Anderson | 08/26/11

Among those matters generally filed under "Mutually Exclusive" are "sex" and "Iranian cinema," but there's genuine heat emanating from "'Circumstance," director Maryam Keshavarz's stylish cry of outrage against Iran's criminalization of all things youthful: music, dancing, romance—the gateway drugs of intellectual adulthood. There will be complaints that "Circumstance" launches its attack on Tehran from a safe distance, both culturally and geographically—the New York University-educated Ms. Keshavarz filmed clandestinely in Beirut—but this is not a documentary, nor a solely political film: Although the circumstances of the story involve theocratic oppression and rampant villainy, this is a movie about longing, desire, desperation and the abandonment of principle—quite a collection of themes, all universal.

It's also supremely cinematic: In her portrayal of the three principals—the privileged Atafeh (Nikohl Boosheri), the orphaned beauty Shireen (Sarah Kazemy), and Atafeh's crackhead-cum-Islamo-fascist brother Mehran (Reza Sixo Safai)—Ms. Keshavarz uses the mechanics of moviemaking to create interior dialogues and expose the lie of religious fundamentalism. Although there is little that would be deemed explicit by Western standards, there is one scene involving nudity and lesbian sex; one assumes it is the fantasy of one of the movie's girls-gone-wild, until Mehran wakes up and you realize that one person's pleasantly erotic sex dream would likely be a religious zealot's screaming nightmare.

"If you could be anywhere in the world," a voice asks at the beginning of the film, "where would you be?" Not in present-day Tehran. But a screening of "Circumstance" wouldn't be out of the question.