

## Iranian (Iranien): Berlin Review

1:08 PM PST 2/21/2014 by Deborah Young

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### The Bottom Line

An amusing game to watch, even if the final score is 0-0

### Venue

Berlin Film Festival (Forum), Feb. 9, 2014.

### Director/Screenwriter

Mehran Tamadon

## An Iranian expat filmmaker invites four hard-liners to experiment with a pluralistic society

Iranian expat documaker **Mehran Tamadon** brings a European sensibility and sense of humor to a surreal encounter he engineers by inviting four bearded defenders of the Islamic Republic of Iran to debate basic issues with him, like the need for women to wear head scarves and freedom of the press. Even if the outcome of their discussions is easily foreseeable, the concept is irresistible. Yes, there are small chinks in his guests' ideological armor, but the East-West positions are discouragingly fixed. What would have made this small doc exceptional is some significant breakthrough in cross-cultural understanding, some off-guard moment of doubt, which never happens. It will mainly attract curious Iran-watchers who will want to see how the game plays out.

This is the third doc from Tamadon, a trained architect who lives in Paris with his family. It took him 12 years to persuade four pro-regimers who dress like clerics (but they are never identified as such) to challenge his terribly Westernized viewpoint on camera. The actual meeting takes place over the course of two days, in the neutral space of his country home in Iran. Though he urges the mullahs' wives to participate, they disappear into the back of the house and are barely glimpsed in the film, except for a friendly picnic on the lawn.

Tamadon is very much the French intellectual as he smilingly outlines the house rules. This, he says, is a secular, public space not exclusive to any one ideology, and the idea is to live together civilly. The living room is strewn with Persian carpets on which everyone sits cross-legged, Tamadon on one side and his four opponents on the other. One of them, wearing a white turban, takes the lead in twisting all his liberal ideas into their opposite. Example: Women's dress is a big issue. When the bespectacled, clean-shaven director challenges the veil, he's accused of putting limitations on their traditions. In the 1979 national referendum after the revolution, 98% voted for the Islamic Republic, they point out. But, rebuts Tamadon, that was 34 years ago and voters didn't know the veil would be imposed. "Very funny, Mr. Secular, we just want to control society."

It's noteworthy that all the issues revolve around how women should behave. The mullahs say abortion is allowed, but only if there is danger to the life of mother or child. But no way will they give ground on music: a female voice or even a high-pitched male voice is totally taboo, lest it provoke "wanton joy or excitement." Tamadon suggests they "raise people's level of maturity so female singing won't excite them." Yet the whole sticking point seems theoretical in view of the enormous influence Western music has in the country today, as shown in **Bahman Ghobadi's** voyage through Iran's rock scene, *No One Knows About Persian Cats*, for instance.

The whole debate would be unbearable if the clerics took the situation more seriously, or if they weren't so joking and laid-back, even likable. At one point they force the atheist Tamadon to join them in prayers (he hasn't a clue what to do), but they're certainly as aware as he is that these two days of enforced tolerance have changed no one's opinions in the slightest.

*Venue: Berlin Film Festival (Forum), Feb. 9, 2014.*

Production companies: L'atelier documentaire, Box Productions, Mehran Tamadon Production

*Director: Mehran Tamadon*

*Screenwriter: Mehran Tamadon*

*Producers: Raphael Pilloso, Elena Tatti*

*Director of photography: Mohammad Reza Jahanpanah*

*Editor: Mehran Tamadon, Marie-Helene Dozo, Luc Forveille, Olivier Zuchuat*

*Sales Agent: Doc & Film International*

*No rating, 105 minutes.*

**Links:**

[1] <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/im-not-angry-asabani-nistam-680806>

[2] <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/13-fajr-review-678170>

[3] <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/triptych-triptyque-berlin-review-681934>