INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR

WHERE DID THE IDEA OF THIS TV SHOW COME FROM?
This kind of reality show really exists in my country... They stage and put at stake the pardon of convicts in various ways. The show that inspired me the most has been on air for about ten years, it is a big hit during the month of Ramadan in Iran. A friend who knew what I had in mind for my next film - the story of a woman who is sentenced to death for killing her husband - advised me to watch it. I was astounded: a live TV show about the life and death of a human being! It inspired the programme in the film, which I satirically called Joy of forgiveness.

AND WHAT ABOUT THE FILM’S TITLE?
Yalda is a Zoroastrian celebration that marks the beginning of winter, the longest night of the year. Families gather with their relatives and friends; people tell stories and recite Hafez poems, one of the pillars of Persian culture. This celebration has always made a big impression on me, ever since I was a child, and I thought that it was the perfect setting for my story: a long night, where anything can happen. It inspired the programme in the film, which I satirically called Joy of forgiveness.

HOW DOES YOUR FILM REFLECT TODAY’S IRANIAN SOCIETY?
In my opinion, all genres, even melodrama, reflect reality. But since I started out as a documentary director, it was important to me that each detail in the story was believable, and that the story was rooted in today’s Iranian society. As for Mona’s accident with a motorcyclist, to me, it is quite symbolic: it shows the injustice in modern societies, the clash between the rich and the poor. The motorcyclist who was knocked over by Mona could be the grandson of the old man who passes around a tray of beverages at the studio, whom nobody notices. I was once in a cab in Teheran with an eighty-year-old driver who could barely drive, but who had to work anyway. These characters stand for that stratum of society, for people who are proud, who won’t beg. The motorcyclist run over by Mona’s big car shows such pride. He does not insult her, he just gets angry because Mona despises him. In this world, the poor are often prouder, more human and dignified.

SOCIETY?

WHAT HAPPY ENDING ARE YOU REFERRING TO? From now on, Maryam will only face misery in this society. If in this world, morality seems to have died out, we need to build a new one, that we might call “humanity”, in which forgiving is all about putting yourself in someone else’s shoes. Rather than some emotional twist, I chose to show, from afar, cars driving away in different directions into the night. Destinies diverge, and it is up to us to imagine the long nights to come.
Born in Tehran, Iran, in 1972, Massoud Bakhshi has worked as film critic, scriptwriter and producer, before making 12 documentaries and short films which were awarded internationally. His first feature film *A Respectable Family* was selected at Cannes Film Festival 2012 (Quinzaine des réalisateurs). *Yalda, a night for forgiveness* is his second feature film, selected at the Word Cinema Dramatic Competition Sundance Film Festival 2020 and at the 70th Berlin International Film Festival Generation 14+ Competition 2020.

**CAST**

- Maryam Sadaf ASGARI
- Mona Behnaz JAFARI
- Ayat (the producer) Babak KARIMI
- The mother Fereshteh SADRE ORAFAEE
- Keshavarz Forough GHAJEBEGLOU
- Omid (the TV host) Arman DARVISH
- Anar Fereshteh HOSSEINI

**Written & directed by** Massoud BAKHSHI
**Produced by** Jacques BIDOU, Marianne DUMOULIN

**Camera** Julian ATANASSOV
**Editor** Jacques COMETS
**Sound** Dana FARZANEHPOUR, Denis SECHAUD
**Art** Mahmoud BAKHSHI, Leila NAGHDI PARI

**1st assistant director** Arash NAIMAN
**Costume** Rana AMINI
**Gaffer** Helder LOUREIRO ALVES DA SILVA, Pouya EGHBALI

**Production manager** Kambiz SAFARI
**Coproducers** Nicole GERHARDS, Joëlle BERTOSSA and Flavia ZANON, Bady MINCK
and Alexander DUMREICHER-IVANCEANU,
Georges SCHOUCAIR, Fred PREMEL, Ali MOSAFFA

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