



MOVIE REVIEW

Circumstance

'Circumstance' a forbidden love story

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CIRCUMSTANCE

Written and directed by: Maryam Keshavarz

Starring: Nikohl Boosheri, Sarah Kazemy, Reza Sixo Safai

At: Kendall Square, Coolidge Corner

Running time: 107 minutes

Rated: R (sexual content, language, some drug use)

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In Farsi, with subtitles

"Circumstance" is a rhapsodic erotic romance that takes place in a cultural prison, and it pulses with a defiance that would be mischievous if it weren't so rip-roaringly angry. In short, a love story between two teenage girls is revolutionary by default when it happens in Iran.

Not that the movie was or could be shot there. The first feature by the young Iranian-American filmmaker Maryam Keshavarz, "Circumstance" was filmed in Beirut with a largely expatriate cast, and while it's not explicit, the sensuality is outrageous enough to get the leading actresses stoned if they wandered into the wrong neighborhoods in Tehran.

The subject, of course, is double lives, the de facto mode of existence in a police state. Atefah (Nikohl Boosheri) comes from a family of educated, westernized doctors while Shireen (Sarah Kazemy) is poor - her parents were intellectuals who disappeared in one purge or another - but the world sees them as two identical schoolgirls in gray robes and head coverings.

What the world doesn't see is the "sewing circle" they sneak off to after school: a secret nightclub where the dresses are spangly and low cut and there's enough sex, drugs, and techno to stun a mullah. It's a rich kids' playground and the boys are jaded and unpoliticized - they know their dads can buy them out of trouble. The only militant is a gay American-born kid (Sina Amedson) who enlists the gang's help dubbing the Sean Penn movie "Milk" into Farsi.

Keshavarz dramatizes the girls' gradual move from giggly friendship to mutual seduction in a dreamy, conscious flow: for them, sex between women is both the ultimate rebellion and the innermost chamber of their double lives. They're also just plain hot for each other, and the

movie's hot for them, the camera swooning to the rhythms of taboo lounge music and rap. One of the many threads Keshavarz follows here is the overripe emotions of Douglas Sirk's Hollywood melodramas in the 1950s, with their female heroines both ennobled and trapped by their own desires.