

EHSAN RASOULOF PRESENT



Karlovy Vary
International Film Festival
Proxima Competition



LIKE A FISH ON THE MOON

A film by Dornaz HAJIHA

IRAN | 2022 | Drama | Color | 78'
Farsi | DCP | 24fps / 1.85 : 1 / 5.1

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LIKE A FISH ON THE MOON by Dornaz HAJIHA



LOGLINE

When a family drama turns into a puzzle. A journey of searching to cure the silence.

SYNOPSIS

Haleh is a very protective mother, whom spoil her 4 years-old boy Ilya. When the boy stops talking, Haleh and her husband Amir start searching for the reason and the remedy for his mutism. The more they try to talk to the boy or consults experts, the worst things are becoming.

LIKE A FISH ON THE MOON by Dornaz HAJIHA

IN CONVERSATION WITH DORNAZ HAJIHA

What Inspired you to make this film?

Once, I had a long conversation with my mom about my childhood. She told me how she regretted the way they handled me as a kid. She was too nervous wishing I would be a normal kid, and she was too concerned with the way I would act, instead of just loving me as I was.

Also, I thought about what it means to be “normal”. How far can you go before you are labeled as “not normal”? And then, what would your family do in such a situation? I realized how narrow these margins are in a traditional society like Iran. If you don't act or talk in a certain way, you could feel like the whole society is against you. It wants to change you and make you like everyone else.

In *Like a Fish on the Moon*, I play with the idea of a child not acting normal and taking it to the extreme.



How was the script written?

I didn't go through a traditional process of script writing with this film. I had some images and scenes in my mind but I couldn't link them together. One day, a plot came to my mind that connected all these images and emotions. The story of a kid that suddenly stops talking linked all different things together, and I suddenly ended up with a full script.

LIKE A FISH ON THE MOON by Dornaz HAJIHA

You have already made shorts with kids, how do you choose them as actors and how do you work with them?

First of all, it's not important for me if they have any acting experience. Actually, I prefer children who have no acting experience at all. They are more genuine. My audition method changes according to the character, so if the actors' appearance works for the character, I would go out with them for a snack or something. I try to know them better and let them get more comfortable around me. If everything goes well, I arrange another session with them bringing a camera. It's very important that they don't change attitude in front of the camera. I want them to completely ignore the camera's presence. Then, it's time to introduce them to the other actors, usually their parents' characters.



At this point, I take a step back and let the child have his own safe and comfortable zone with his film-parents. We go out together, spend time in different settings, but I wouldn't be involved and let the film-parents interact with the child directly. Depending on the story I give certain instructions to the actors.

In the case of *Like a Fish on the Moon*, I asked the mom character to be more involved with the child. She took care of him and played with him. And the dad was less involved. Then when we started filming, as the story moved forward and the mom was less involved and the dad had to take care of him, the child's awkwardness came out naturally. I like to create a natural world for all of my actors, then I step out and let the camera film it.

LIKE A FISH ON THE MOON by Dornaz HAJIHA

You concentrated the story on Haleh and his parents. We don't see the grandparents, not much either of the friends or other relatives. Even the first doctor they go to see isn't on screen. Why did you decide to keep them out of frame, away from our eyes?



In my story, I wanted to isolate the family. We only see the three of them because no one else can understand what they are going through. I want my audience to feel how this family is suffocating through this process and by the end of the film, they get to a motionless state. They are trapped in a world where no one can understand them or help them. In the end, their only option is to accept their situation. Adding more characters would have killed this lonely feeling.

Your film seems to use a quite realistic narration yet you have a mysterious and surreal title. Do you expect the audience to search for some hidden or surreal elements while discovering the film?

I don't expect the audience to search for any elements. I just want them to feel the feelings in the story. But there is a mystery in the storyline. We never understand the actual reason for the child's behavior or if there is anything wrong with him. I keep that mystery in the story and echo it in the visual style of the film to create a surreal feeling. For example, some extreme red lights in the frame, which could have some realistic reasons in the film's world, like a car causing it. I can say the acting is even hyper-realistic, but the context is not and I like that contrast.



LIKE A FISH ON THE MOON by Dornaz HAJIHA



Why this title LIKE A FISH ON THE MOON?

The way the kid feels, and later the way the mom and the father feel, is like a fish on the moon, not like a fish in the sea.

Why do you decide there are quite a few scenes in the family car? They don't walk much or stay outside without a car...

In Tehran, we spend a lot of our time in the car. Tehran is a metropolis with a population of more than ten million people and with a public transportation system that is not sufficient at all. As a result, everyone moves around by car. And since you're stuck in heavy traffic every day, a lot of your time is spent in the car. I also wanted to show them in between places to increase the sense of isolation I was looking for. It also shows that they never get settled in any place. They are just trying to get from one place to another, and having them in the car creates this feeling perfectly. I want to show the family's reaction to the actions we haven't seen, because we are witnessing how this family is coping with what is happening outside. The car scenes seemed like the perfect choice

LIKE A FISH ON THE MOON by Dornaz HAJIHA

You worked with your two main actors previously. Was it important to collaborate with them again for your first feature?

Our first experience was so good that I wanted to collaborate with them again. They started their professional career with me. They worked really hard for my short and had a great chemistry between them. I realized they could be a better couple than what I had in my short, so it was interesting for all of us to give it another go. It was a great collaboration for the three of us.



Why did you want to work with them in the first time?

Sepidar, who plays the wife, is a professional actress who has studied acting. I saw a video of her and I like it. She was living in Italy at the time, and she came all the



way to Iran just for the audition. Her passion was really interesting for me. As soon as I met her, I realized she was the one I wanted to work with. But for this film, we had more work to do. To get her into this mother character for *Like a Fish on the Moon*, we had a lot of work on both sides which eventually paid off.

Shahdiar, who plays the role of the husband, is not even an actor. He is an architect. While I was looking for the male character for my short, *Marziye*, I saw him in a café and instantly I knew he was the right choice.

LIKE A FISH ON THE MOON by Dornaz HAJIHA

You studied cinema in Iran and in London Film School, in which way do you think your film is influenced by Iranian cinema and your studies abroad?

The first film that inspired me to become a filmmaker was made by Bahram Beyzaei, a well-known filmmaker in Iran. His films are theatrical in a way and there is always a mystery in them that I really like. The way his actors act and the way he tells a story add a surreal element to his film which has inspired me a lot. I was also inspired by Asghar Farhadi, who was my first teacher when I took cinema courses. He is known for his realistic and naturalistic acting and storytelling. Basically, these two inspired me a lot in the making of *Like a Fish on the Moon*.

London Film School taught me how to remain professional while you develop your own style. In other words, LFS taught me what are the rules of cinema that you have to abide by while you apply your own taste creating your art.



LIKE A FISH ON THE MOON by Dornaz HAJIHA



DORNAZ HAJIHA'S BIOGRAPHY

Born in 1988 in Tehran, Dornaz HAJIHA received her Bachelor of Arts in Graphic Design from Al Zahra University, Tehran, in 2011.

She worked as a photographer and graphic designer while attending film workshops with maestros Asghar Farhadi and Bahram Beyzayi.

She completed her MA in Film Production and graduated from the London Film School with distinction in 2015. She directed and wrote several short films and documentary, including MARZIYEH and MARLON (2017).

LIKE A FISH ON THE MOON is her debut film.

HAIHA is developing her second feature DIAPHANOUS, produced by CHINESE SHADOWS.

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DORNAZ HAJIHA'S FILMOGRAPHY

LIKE A FISH ON THE MOON, 2022, Drama, Color, 78'
Karlovy Vary IFF 2022, Proxima Competition

MARZIYEH, 2017, 29', Color, Short Film
Tehran short film festival, 2017, Grand Jury Prize
Urban international film festival, 2017, Best Short Film & Best Directing
London short film festival, 2017, Official Selection

MARLON, 2017, 13', Color, Short Film
Kazan international youth film festival, 2018, Grand Jury Prize
Children and youth Intl film festival, Iran, 2018, Best Short Film
Fajr Film Festival, 2018, Competition
London short film festival, 2017, Official Selection

THREE, FOUR DAYS AGO, 2010, 11', Color, Short Film
The image of the year film festival, 2012, Honorary Diploma

LIKE A FISH ON THE MOON by Dornaz HAJIHA

CAST & CREW

HALEH, the mother
AMIR, the father
ILYA, the son

Sepidar TARI
Shahdiyar SHAKIBA
Ali AHMADI

Written & directed by

Dornaz HAJIHA

Director of photography

Alireza BARAZANDE

Editor

Ashkan MEHRI

Sound Design & Mix
Thanks to

Vahid MOGHADASI
Hassan MAHDAVI

Sound Recordist

Hassan SHABANKAREH

Colorist

Nima DABIRZADEH
Hootan HAGSHENAS

Costume & Production Design

Diba HAJIHA
Siamak KARINEJHAD

Make Up

Omid GOLZADEH

Technical Advisor

Peyman MAADI

Script Consultant

Amirhossein YAZDANI

Producer

Ehsan RASOULOF

International Sales

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