My Tehran for Sale

Directed by Granaz Moussavi
Cyan Films

Granaz Moussavi’s documentary-style film
(winner of an Independent Spirit Award in 2009) is an
understated peek inside the
contradictory nature of
everyday life in Iran. My
Tehran for Sale opens with a
scene that would probably
be familiar to many
Westerners: young adults at
a rave. Things suddenly
take a turn when Iranian moral police raid the barn where the party is being held to arrest and
assault party-goers.

Viewers are introduced to the main character, Marzieh (played by Marzieh Vafamehr), as she slips
away from the party with Saman (Amir Chegini), an Australian citizen who becomes her boyfriend
and possible escape route. While the family staying in the watch house near the barn is taken away
for trying to sneak into Iran from Afghanistan, Marzieh is looking for a way out.

Media images of Iran tend to focus on political radicalism, not on ordinary people, so My Tehran for
Sale is a welcome change. The contrast between Marzieh’s street clothes, which alternate between
a chador and a manteau, and her indoor clothing (jeans, tank tops, and no hijab covering her
buzzed haircut) is representative of the way many Iranian women live. The underlying message
of the movie is subtle but clear: the actions of the Iranian government do not correspond to the
Iranian people’s private lives.

In one revealing exchange between Marzieh and her niece, she tells the young girl that girls aren’t
allowed to ride bicycles to school. The girl responds, “Then I will dress like a boy. I’m not scared.”
Marzieh ominously tells her, “When you get older you will be.”

Moussavi jabs at those who think Iranian women are downtrodden victims of fundamentalist Islam.
Marzieh is a dancer and artist who smokes, drinks, and lives with her boyfriend before marriage.
The government is an ever-present concern and intrusion, but the citizens of Iran do not live without
autonomy.

The real novelty of My Tehran for Sale is that it was shot with a handheld camera in Tehran. That
does somewhat limit the views of the city, which is understandable but unfortunate. According to
internet buzz, Moussavi sneaked the footage out of Iran in her luggage, which (considering
Marzieh’s story) is in itself rather poetic. Already a celebrated writer and poet, Moussavi’s first
major film is a triumph.
This sounds like such an incredible film. It's true, many Westerners do not stop to think about the people and the daily lives, it has become a focus on politics and propaganda. As Moussavi delves into the personal world of people she sheds light on the Iran that some may not know even exists.