

TWO ON THE AISLE: "CHILDREN OF HEAVEN" -

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By Joe Kirkish



CHILDREN OF HEAVEN –

Like any nation controlled by a strong political and religious orientation, Iran poses serious restrictions on its artists – particularly those engaged in film production. Rules are stringent, the government has the last word, often stifling the creative act from the start.

So filmmakers improvise. One way to bypass the obstacles is to show life through the eyes of children – to focus on their lives as beautiful, strange, innocent, happy, frightening, sad – seen as both regional and universal at the same time.

That's what filmmaker Majid Majidi has done. He brings us down to the level of two children in this remarkable movie about today's life in the poorer section of Tehran. Politics don't exist in their world; Majidi's youngsters are far too busy simply living from one child's daily crisis to another, at home and abroad.

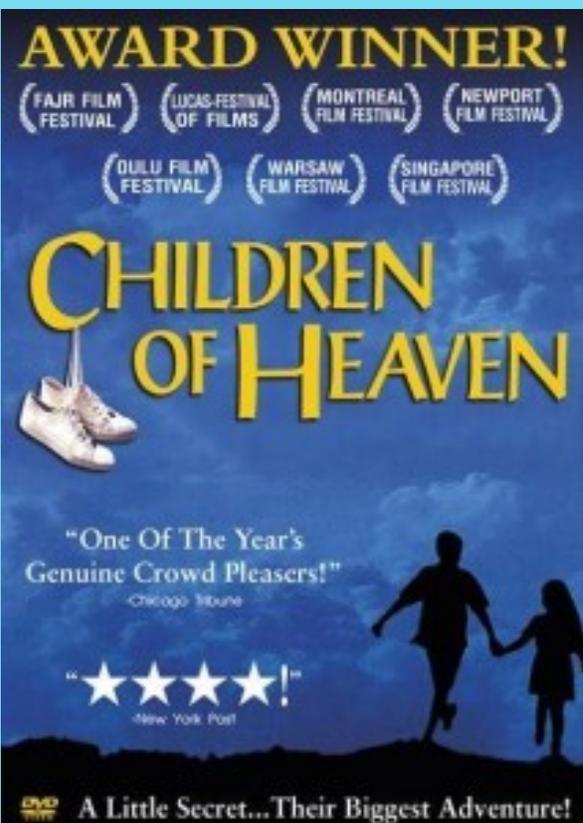
The young hero is Ali, a desolate-looking 10-year old with huge brown eyes and a way of sending a tear suddenly rolling down his cheeks, especially after he has accidentally lost his younger sister's only pair of shoes and doesn't dare tell his parents about it. A scheme is devised between them: Ali will share his well-worn sneakers with his sister Zahra until they can find a way to replace her shoes. It's tough going, with harrowing near tragedies along the way, but guile and clever fast thinking prevent disaster.

Meanwhile, we follow them through days at school, helping with family chores at home, and evading serious obstacles to their everyday living in near poverty. There's a humorous episode in which Ali helps his father attempt getting a job with a gardening program for people in the richer parts of the city, followed by a frightening ride down a long hill on a defective bicycle, and, most exciting of all, a foot race that defies anything as exciting as, say, Rocky's feats in the boxing ring, and a concluding bitter-sweet dip in the community gold fish pond – all lifted, according to the writer/director, as memories of incidents from his own growing up under similar circumstances in that Iranian city.

Majidi bypasses the religious/political issues and concentrates – and highlights – images of a kindly, enveloping sense of Iranian life and customs, from the way the family prepares sugar cubes to be served at a mosque to the way the children care for their parents and elderly neighbors.

The beauty of this film emanates from the eyes of the children, from the wonderful majestic world before growing up - when a pair of shoes or shining gold pen could make you come running proudly home from school, down familiar walled streets, to a home where parents' approval or disapproval was paramount – at a time when the care between brothers and sisters wasn't something to be contemplated, manipulated or even expressed – it simply was.

It doesn't matter if you grew up here or in Tehran, that childhood spirit proves universal and it permeates the entire film with a unique kind of warmth, understanding and humor that no Hollywood kids movie could ever express.



"Children of Heaven" is for grown-ups who long for the best that childhood once offered them and for kids who will identify easily with these children as well. It deserves the critical acclaim and world awards given to it, honoring it for the special emotional lift it brings to everyone who witnesses it at least once.

You can see it at
the Calumet Theatre on
Friday the 14th at 7:15pm.

And you can enjoy an
exotic Mid-eastern buffet from the chefs at
Victoria's Kitchen, Houghton, beforehand, at 6pm.

Buffet and movie, \$22. Movie alone, \$7.
For the buffet, call the theatre at least by late
Thursday the 13th: 337-2610.