

THE INSTITUTE FOR THE INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT
OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG ADULTS - KANOON
PRESENTS



HARMONICA

A FILM BY AMIR NADERI

1973 – IRAN – DRAMA – PERSIAN – 76'

RESTORED IN 4K UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF ROASHANA LABORATORY



SYNOPSIS

After a young boy receives a harmonica as present from abroad, his friends compete for the privilege of holding it or even blowing a few notes.

AMIR NADERI ON THE FILM - DIRECTOR

In making *Harmonica*, I found my true path. It grew from the depths of my own childhood which led to making my other films *Waiting* and *The Runner*. Together, they became my childhood trilogy. I owe this trilogy to inspirations from *The 400 Blows*, the *Apu* Trilogy, De Sica's films, and Bunuel's *Los Olvidados* that gave me the courage to find my own voice. I made *Harmonica* in the South of Iran where I grew up. Working with children who have never seen a camera before, with the colors of the South, and experimenting with impressionist painting styles to create the atmosphere of my childhood, was such an enjoyable experience.

It is now very interesting for me that after so many years, I will see a newly restored version of my film with an audience on the big screen at the Venice Classics program.

Cut...

Amir Naderi, Director

THREE EARLY FILMS – NOTE ON AMIR NADERI’S DEBUT FILMS BY CORENTIN LÊ, TROISCOULEURS

It begins with the senses: an intense exposure to light and heat, like opening your eyes for the first time. This is how three of the films by Iranian filmmaker Amir Naderi made in the early part of his career start: *Waiting* (1974), *Harmonica* (1974) and *The Runner* (1984), his most successful film. The latter is about young children who are thrown into an incandescent world, left to fend for themselves in a place where the constant sunrays prevent them from looking up too long. Learning to free oneself from the shackles of this harsh world takes time. Throughout these three films, in which the characters grow by experiencing and confronting the elements, Amir Naderi reflects on his own childhood. ‘I grew up on the streets and cinema became my only home’, said the filmmaker in 2017¹, during a retrospective dedicated to his work at the Pompidou Centre, celebrating major works of modern Iranian cinema. Born in the port of Abadan in 1945, Naderi is surrounded by unusual backdrops and landscapes. Close to the Persian Gulf, on the border of Iraq and very close to Kuwait, the kind of Iran that the filmmaker depicts is wedged between clay and metal, surprising and paradoxical. Just like Naderi’s own story: orphaned by the age of five, he became a street child, wandering the ghostly docks of Abadan, before working in cinema, gradually honing his skills behind the camera as he discovered modern western cinema from his projection booth.

Experiencing the world

When he was 28, in 1974, Naderi made two brilliant films for Kanoon, the Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults, of which Abbas Kiarostami then led the film department. The previous year, Naderi wrote the screenplay for Kiarostami’s first feature film, *Experience*, about a young teenager wandering through the maze-like streets of Teheran. *Waiting* and *Harmonica* could have almost shared the same title as Kiarostami’s film they have so much in common: the exposure to violence through a hyper-sensitive lens but determined to find a redeeming ‘experience’. Naderi has such a strong identity of his own that the comparison between these two directors ends here. Between *Waiting* and *The Runner*, the first is undoubtedly the film that best defines his style, mid-way between 1950’s European neo-realism and the formalism of the 1970’s and 1980’s. *Waiting* is a medium-length film lasting around forty minutes, which follows a young boy tasked by his aunt to collect a bowl of ice from the mysterious neighbor every day, of which we can only see a hand passing through a half-open door. The surprisingly simple plot reveals the framework of a much more sophisticated story about the child’s awakening of the senses. Just by seeing the way the boy gazes at the bowl full of ice, through which sunlight diffracts light into multicolored rays, one understands the extent to which Naderi’s cinema is above all about the senses: throughout his work, people are ‘confront the world through their bodies’².

¹ Letter from Amir Naderi to Jean-Michel Frodon, Los Angeles, 21st October 2017, for the Amir Naderi Retrospective at the Pompidou Centre in Paris.

² Alla Gadassik, " A National Filmmaker without a Home : Home and Displacement in the Films of Amir Naderi ", *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, Vol. 31, n°2, 2011, p. 480.

Introspective and beautifully visual, *Waiting* is a film of few words, the main arc being how the young boy interacts with the world, bordering fantasy and nightmare. The end of *Waiting* reveals the darker side of Naderi's cinema; where wonder is bound to an underlying sense of cruelty. *Harmonica* is the most striking example of this. On the surface, it's the lightest of all his stories: a boy who is ill is given a harmonica to help him get well but it also brings up the envy of his friends, including young Amiro. The latter is obsessed with the instrument and agrees to everything its owner demands from him, in the hope of having a go. In appearance, this radiant tale could have belonged to the genre of juvenile comedy, but in fact sheds light on the perverting effects the cruel laws of commerce have on childhood: with an object as insignificant as a harmonica, the young people enter a market-driven logic. A logic fueled by the desire for something different (we find out it was a gift made by a Japanese sailor to a villager) as well as an aesthetic experience (through music). The instrument embodies, through repressed bitterness, the vampiric thirst for modernity by these young souls who pursue an uncertain destiny.

Enduring the universe

As an even more explicit account of 'Iran's modern trauma'³, *The Runner* is Naderi's most accomplished, best-known, and perhaps most personal film. Using the same framework as *Waiting* and *Harmonica* (an orphan left to fend for himself tries to find his way through a series of experiences of striking intensity), the filmmaker sets the story in the city he grew up in. In Abadan, young Amiro lives at breakneck speed chasing the machines of this oil city. All the signs of the country's globalization and modernization become an obsession for this street kid: planes, trains, boats. They also fuel his desire. Having made his nest in a stranded ship, Amiro becomes the victim of a series of injustices whilst at the same time bursting with energy. His constant moves guide the form of the narrative and the rhythm of the editing, which is riddled with breaks, slowdowns, and accelerations, always outpouring, but never strained. Naderi's work could be qualified as a cinema of endurance, in the sense of a race that never stops, but also as something that is endured, to experience the world in hope of taking flight, but whose law of dust tumbles the young boy over and over. A few years after the release of *The Runner* in 1984, Naderi boarded the plane Amiro dreamt of at the end of this breathtaking film, when he screams towards the plane leaving Abadan: fed up with censorship. The filmmaker crossed the Atlantic over to New York where he continued his work. Naderi's work strongly resonates with the present time, where many filmmakers in Iran find their actions restricted and their speech silenced. Naderi's early films continue to bear loud witness of what a free and creative cinema can achieve.

Corentin Lê, TROISCOULEURS

³ Amir Barati, "Trauma of Iranian Modernity and Desir for Machine in Naderi's *The Runner*", *Mise-en-scène : The Journal of Film & Visual Narration*, Vol. 7, n°1, 2022.

AMIR NADERI - DIRECTOR

Born August 15th, 1946, in Abadan, Iran. In 1971, his directorial debut, *Goodbye, Friend*, was released in Iran. Amir Naderi first came into the international spotlight with films that are now known as cinema classics, *The Runner* (1985), and *Water, Wind, Dust* (1989).

The Runner is considered by many critics to be one of the most influential films of the past quarter century. After expatriating to New York in the early 1990's, Amir Naderi continued to produce new work. He was named a Rockefeller Film and Video Fellow in 1997 and has served as an artist in residence and instructor at Columbia University, the University of Las Vegas, and New York's School of Visual Arts. His US films have premiered at the Film Society of Lincoln Center/ MoMA's New Directors/ New Films series, the Venice, Cannes, Tribeca, and Sundance Film Festivals.

FILMOGRAPHY

- 2018** MAGIC LANTERN
- 2016** MOUTAIN
- 2014** MISE EN SCENE WITH ARTHUR PENN
- 2013** VENICE 70: FUTURE RELOADED
- 2011** 60 SECONDS OF SOLITUDE IN YEAR ZERO
- 2011** CUT – Venice Orizzonti Official Selection
- 2008** VEGAS: BASED ON A TRUE STORY – Venice Competition
- 2005** SOUND BARRIER
- 2002** MARATHON
- 1997** A, B, C... MANHATTAN – Cannes Un Certain Regard Official Selection
- 1993** MANHATTAN BY NUMBERS
- 1989** WATER, WIND, DUST
- 1984** THE WINNER
- 1984** THE RUNNER
- 1981** SECOND SEARCH
- 1980** THE SEARCH
- 1978** MADE IN IRAN

1978 REQUIEM

1974 HARMONICA

1974 WAITING

1973 STRAIT

1973 TIGHT SPOT

1971 GOODBYE, FRIEND

CAST

Amiro

Masoud Gudarzi

Mehdi Javadi

Amiro's Mother

Shahla Darvishi

Yaghoob Moradzadeh

Mohammad Moradzadeh

Abbas Pourahmadi

CREW

Director	Amir Naderi
Writer	Amir Nadir
Director's assistant	Reza Zahiri
Director of Photography	Alireza Zarindast
Editor	Sohrab Shahid Saless
Sound Designer & Mix	Harayer Atashkar
Sound Editor	Amir-Hossein Hami
Sound Recordist	Ahmad Asgari
Produced by	Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young adults - KANOON
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INTERNATIONAL SALES

Frédérique Rouault, Head of Collections
frederique.rouault@mk2.com

Jacques-Antoine Jagou, International Sales Library
jacques.jagou@mk2.com

Fionnuala Jamison, Managing Director
fionnuala.jamison@mk2.com

Olivier Barbier, Head of Acquisitions
olivier.barbier@mk2.com

Quentin Bohanna, International Sales
quentin.bohanna@mk2.com

Elise Cochin, International Sales
elise.cochin@mk2.com

Anne-Laure Barbarit, Festival Manager
anne-laure.barbarit@mk2.com

Visit our website www.mk2films.com