

Parkville Pictures

PRESENTS

APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR

Directed by Desiree Akhavan



WORLD PREMIERE – NEXT SECTION

2014
SUNDANCE FILM FESTIVAL

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SHORT SYNOPSIS

Shirin is struggling to become an ideal Persian daughter, politically correct bisexual and hip young Brooklynite but fails miserably in her attempt at all identities. Being without a cliché to hold onto can be a lonely experience.

SYNOPSIS

For Shirin (Desiree Akhavan), being part of a perfect Persian family isn't easy. Acceptance eludes her from all sides: her family doesn't know she's bisexual, and her ex-girlfriend, Maxine (Rebecca Henderson), can't understand why she doesn't tell them. Even the six-year-old boys in her moviemaking class are too ADD to focus on her for more than a second. Following a family announcement of her brother's betrothal to a parentally approved Iranian prize catch, Shirin embarks on a private rebellion involving a series of pansexual escapades, while trying to decipher what went wrong with Maxine.

Written and directed by Akhavan, *APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR* introduces a gray area to the coming-out narrative; in an Iranian-American family, sharing information about one's sexuality isn't always the right approach to liberation. With her priceless deadpan delivery, Akhavan's portrayal of Shirin is the film's true revelation—a woman caught between self-doubt and self-possession, trapped in a web of family mores and societal expectations, with all their accompanying—and often hilarious—complexities. (Synopsis by Kim Yutani)

Director's Statement

I've been in development for APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR since I was 10. As a latch-key child of immigrants, it was around that age that I started realizing what a freak of nature I was. Even though I had the perspective, wit and desires of a normal person, these qualities were somehow mismatched to the circumstances I was born to (female/ Iranian-American/ bisexual). I knew if I wanted to see reflections of myself in mainstream culture I'd have to do it myself.

The film is inspired by my experience facing life after my first serious relationship with a woman. Not only was I heartbroken, but also experiencing the most uncomfortable phase of the coming out process: the time that follows *after* you've made the big announcement. Your family has no idea of how to process the information and you can't look them in the eye without wondering if they're imagining you having gay sex now that they know that you're capable of it. I decided I wanted to make a film that touched on the themes that were ruling my life, but without the classic film cliches: no huge break-through hugging-through-our-tears coming out scene, no clear cut definitions of good and bad, no taking itself too seriously and sex scenes that were honest and true to dating and fucking as I know it.

I chose to star in the film because it would have been disingenuous to have hired a better looking version of me. The film is so clearly a response to my life and my desires, I wanted to put it all on the line. Though it is not autobiographical and the exact events in the film have not taken place, the emotions are true to life, only I evoked them in scenarios that were convenient for the sake of a 90 minute comedy. I was very much influenced by ANNIE HALL and it was that film that inspired the film's structure, which dances back and forth between past and the present.

I'm beginning to notice the terms "Women's Film" and "Gay Film" are seen as dirty words. "Iranian film" is a bit better- more highbrow, but still a chore. The "Iranian Film" is the DVD that arrives and holds up the flow of your Netflix queue for about a month. The one you keep promising to watch on Sunday night, but instead find yourself glued to MISERY, which happens to be on TV that night. I wanted to make a film that didn't feel like "taking your medicine." It's a comedy, but beneath the surface we've set out to communicate something very real about the complexity of being openly bisexual, the subtle rivalry and love between siblings and the crushing expectations that come along with being the child of immigrants.

Desiree Akhavan Interview

What were the challenges and benefits of shooting in New York, specifically Brooklyn?

The biggest challenge is how much people in New York hate anything that interferes with their personal space. Nobody's impressed that you're making a movie and that the dude from 30 ROCK agreed to be in it, they just want you to get the fuck out of their way. One man literally booed at me during a take.

Brooklyn is almost a character unto itself in the film - how did the many idiosyncrasies of the borough affect the narrative?

We follow Shirin as she moves from Park Slope to Bushwick, the shift marking her transition from half of a stable couple to an impulsive wreck. Within Brooklyn, I've lived in Park Slope, Crown Heights & Bed-Stuy and I found that each neighborhood subtly pushed me into adopting a completely different lifestyle. The current state of gentrification in Brooklyn seems to afford twenty-somethings the luxury of jumping from one neighborhood to another as they try on different personalities for size. Within these different zip codes I found that Bushwick is the most conducive to those in transition and a bit reckless.

How did you go about casting your actors?

I worked with casting director Allison Twardziak who understood both the world and the tone of the film perfectly. In fact, on our first day of working together she showed me the Facebook profiles of the friends she thought might be right for the film and, after weeks of auditions, many of them ended up being cast.

What were your influences in making the film?

While writing I looked at films by Woody Allen, Julie Delpy, Sarah Polley &

Noah Baumbach. To me, these filmmakers do a fantastic job of shifting tone. In my experience, life is always slipping back and forth between comedic farce and tragic melodrama, so I appreciate it when films get the balance right and make it feel truthful. I emulate work that lives in the messy grey area, where there are no clear villains or heroes.

What was the writing process like and how much improv was involved?

For me, writing is re-writing. I wrote the first draft in a month and then worked with my producer, Cecilia Frugiuele, for a year to get it right. Cecilia is a very chic & professional Italian woman who just happens to understand my crude, borderline-disgusting humor perfectly. We spent many hours reading the script out-loud and gleaning our memories for juicy anecdotes that would service the story. I like to act out the different characters as we go. There were very little improvisation involved.

How did your web series "The Slope" inspire or grow into the film?

It was the process of making the show that changed my perspective on directing a feature from something I needed to be given permission to do to something I could make happen for myself. We started out with absolutely no budget and nobody to please and ended up creating something people loved. The experience allowed me to let go of the self-doubt I had been holding onto since the beginning of film school (and the mental check-list I had devised of what makes for a successful film: 35mm, name talent, genocide featured in the subject matter) and follow my instincts. I used the same approach when creating this film.

Can you discuss how filmmaking has become somewhat of a therapeutic outlet for you or a means of expression?

When I was 14, I was voted The Ugliest Girl at my high school. There was an actual contest and I actually won it. Two years later I wrote a play about it and performed it for the school. It was an incredibly powerful experience because from that point on the ugliest girl contest wasn't just this crappy thing that happened *to* me, but something I had used to express myself and illustrate to an audience of people what it felt like to be me at age sixteen. That was when I learnt that the best way to react

any kind of shaming was to re-appropriate it.

APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR is a very universal film on love, acknowledging a level of adulthood, and the challenges in life faced with humor. Did you face any concerns with it getting pigeonholed as a "gay film", if not, why the film supersedes that?

I don't. Perhaps I'm naive. I just think that funny is funny and the film is about so much more than sexuality.

As a female Iranian-American filmmaker, do you feel pressure to become a role model to those who cannot see a type of road that you have successfully paved for yourself?

No. Every person establishes their own personal standard of integrity and tries to stick to it, beyond that there's nothing I can do. If I were to get caught up in what people thought of me or what kind of influence I may have (positive or negative) I fear I'd either become too scared to continue making films or transform into a pretentious prick.

What are you most excited about at Sundance this year?

I'm dying to know how people will react to the film. I have very little perspective at this point, but I know for sure it's unlike anything I've ever seen and I can't wait to see how an audience will respond to it.

CAST (In Alphabetical Order)

SCOTT ADSIT – Ken

Scott Adsit is an actor, writer and improvisational comedian, best known for portraying Pete Hornberger in the acclaimed NBC series 30 ROCK. He began his career with Chicago's legendary improvisational comedy group The Second City, alongside Tina Fey, winning the Joseph Jefferson Award for Best Actor in a Comedy for PARADIGM LOST Scott later appeared in a number of TV shows including the HBO cult favorites, MR SHOW and TENACIOUS D. For Adult Swim, he co-created MOREL OREL, being nominated for an Annie Award for his work, and later MARY SHELLEY'S FRANKENHOLE. Scott continues to improvise and teach with IO West and the Upright Citizens Brigade.

DESIREE AKHAVAN – Shirin

See Crew bio.

ANH DUONG – Nasrin

Anh Duong was born and raised in France. After studying Ballet in Paris she started a modeling career, featuring in an YSL campaign for Vogue. From that moment, she worked for many of the most prestigious fashion designers and photographers. She moved to New York where she became an artist and actress after being cast in THE MAMBO KINGS. She then appeared in SCENT OF A WOMAN and MY BEST FRIEND'S WEDDING. She was cast in HIGH ART by Lisa Cholodenko. and LOVE ME and FOR SALE, two French films which appeared at the Cannes and Berlin film festivals. This past year she has acted in TO BE OR NOT TO BE by Laetitia Masson and Abel Ferrara's WELCOME TO NEW YORK. Her artwork, mostly portraits, can be seen at the Sonnabend and Sperone Westwater galleries in New York. She is currently preparing her next exhibition of paintings at London's Robilant & Voena Gallery, opening in early 2014.

HALLEY FEIFFER – Crystal

Halley Feiffer is an actress and a writer known for her work in independent film, television and theatre. Films include Kenneth Lonergan's YOU CAN COUNT ON ME, Noah Baumbach's THE SQUID AND THE WHALE and MARGOT AT THE WEDDING, Oren Moverman's THE MESSENGER, STEPHANIE DALEY, TWELVE THIRTY and FREE SAMPLES, Phil Morrison's ALL IS BRIGHT, Jared Hess' GENTLEMEN BRONCOS, and the upcoming films CUTTER and Noah Buschel's GLASS CHIN. She played Ted Danson's daughter in the final season of HBO's BORED TO DEATH, appeared in Todd Haynes' HBO

miniseries MILDRED PIERCE, and has guest-starred in a number of other prominent TV shows. Theater credits include the Broadway revival of THE HOUSE OF BLUE LEAVES, starring Ben Stiller, for which she won the prestigious Theatre World Award in 2011, Kim Rosenstock's TIGERS BE STILL, Kenneth Lonergan's MEDIEVAL PLAY, and the recent production of Ethan Coen's first full-length play, WOMEN OR NOTHING. She co-wrote and starred in the feature film HE'S WAY MORE FAMOUS THAN YOU, directed by Michael Urie, which was released by Gravititas Ventures last May. Her work as a playwright has been produced and developed by several New York theatres, including the Rattlestick Playwrights Theatre, where her play HOW TO MAKE FRIENDS AND THEN KILL THEM premiered this Fall.

REBECCA HENDERSON – Maxine

Rebecca Henderson is a film, theater and television actress from Toronto, and graduate of Columbia University's MFA program. Her theater credits include TOO MUCH TOO MUCH TOO MANY (Roundabout Theatre Company); THE WHALE (Playwrights Horizons); LE BREA (Clubbed Thumb); RED-HANDED OTTER (The Cherry Lane/Playwright's Realm); AUTUMN SONATA (Yale Rep); THE COLLECTION and A KIND OF ALASKA (Atlantic Theater Company); ROADKILL CONFIDENTIAL (Clubbed Thumb); THE RETRIBUTIONISTS (Playwrights Horizons); SPIN, U.S. DRAG and VENGEANCE (the stageFARM); THREE SISTERS (Nature Theater of Oklahoma); SCAPIN AND THE MISANTHROPE (Classic Stage Company); and BOBRAUSCHENBERGAMERICA (American Repertory Theater). Her Film and TV credits include TRUE STORY, DIVING NORMAL, COMPLIANCE, EAST OF ACADIA, MESKADA, LITTLE HORSES, A LONE STAR STATE and THE GOOD WIFE, while she also voiced characters in the GRAND THEFT AUTO IV and V computer games. Her upcoming projects include Noah Baumbach's next feature and THE MEND.

ARIAN MOAYED – Ali

Arian Moayed is a Tony nominated actor, Artistic Director, arts educator and an award winning writer/director for film. As an actor, Moayed was nominated for a Tony Award for his portrayal of Musa in Rajiv Joseph's BENGAL TIGER AT THE BAGHDAD ZOO. He currently stars in JJ Abrams and Alfonso Cuarón's NBC show, BELIEVE, and next appears in Jon Stewart's directorial debut, ROSEWATER, and has worked with Spike Lee, Tom Fontana, Tony Kushner, Scott Rudin, Kevin Williamson and many more. As Artistic Director of Waterwell, a NY based award-winning non-profit theater, he has helped devise over 13 original productions including GOODBAR (Public Theater), THE | KING | OPERETTA, MARCO MILLIONS and THE PERSIANS, to name a few. As an Arts educator, Moayed administers one of the best public school arts programs in the country as part of the Waterwell Drama Program. With hundreds of students from all economic

backgrounds, WDP partners with the Professional Performing Arts School to offer the highest quality theater training in the country, absolutely free of charge. As a screenwriter and film director, Moayed is in pre-production for his first full-length feature, THIS ISLAND MADE ME. His previously directed two short films, OVERDUE, distributed by Ricki Lake's thebusinessofbeingborn.com, and DAY TEN, starring Omar Metwally.

CREW

DESIREE AKHAVAN –Writer/Director/Actor

Iranian-American filmmaker Desiree Akhavan is the co-creator and star of the critically acclaimed web series THE SLOPE, a comedy that follows a pair of superficial, homophobic lesbians in love. Her first feature, APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR, premiered at the 2014 Sundance Film Festival. Desiree was featured as one of Filmmaker Magazine's "25 New Faces of Independent Film" and will appear on the next season of GIRLS. She has a BA from Smith College and an MFA from NYU's Grad Film Program.

CECILIA FRUGIUELE - Producer

Born and raised in Milan, Italy, Cecilia has been based in the UK since 2004. Since joining Parkville Pictures, she's produced a breadth of work including award-winning shorts as well as online content for Time Magazine and Random House. Cecilia was Associate Producer on Parkville's first feature film Borrowed Time (BBC Films/Film London), and Producer for the short Rufus Stone, directed by Josh Appignanesi (The Infidel, Song of Songs). Cecilia produced the feature film Appropriate Behavior - written and directed by Desiree Akhavan - which premiered at Sundance Film Festival 2014, and is currently developing Akhavan's next feature project. Most recently she produced a short film for Film London as well as being in development for CONCEPTION under Creative England Ifeatures scheme. Cecilia is an alumnus of the Berlinale Talent Campus (2013).

CHRIS TEAGUE – Cinematographer

Chris Teague is a writer, director, cinematographer, and graduate of Columbia University's MFA program. Chris has been a cinematographer on three features and four shorts that have premiered at the Sundance

Film Festival, films such as CHILDREN OF INVENTION, SALT KISS, MAN, ROLLING ON THE FLOOR LAUGHING, and OBVIOUS CHILD. As a writer/director, Chris made the short film MONKEYWRENCH, won Special Jury Prize at the Dallas International Film Festival and Best Narrative Short at the Eugene Film Festival. Chris was also credited with additional cinematography on the Academy Award nominated documentary IF A TREE FALLS: A STORY OF THE EARTH LIBERATION FRONT.

JOSEPHINE WIGGS – Composer

Josephine Wiggs is a multi-instrumentalist best known as bassist of The Breeders. She just completed an eight-month worldwide tour to mark the 20th anniversary re-release of their album LAST SPLASH. Her recent film credits include writing and recording the score for the documentary film BUILT ON NARROW LAND, which premiered at the 2013 Provincetown International Film Festival and was screened at the NYC Architecture and Design Film Festival. She has also composed music for the internationally acclaimed choreographers chameckilerner, scoring soundscapes for full-length performances and soundtracks for their short films, most notably CONVERSATION WITH BOXING GLOVES, which premiered at SFMOMA. Wiggs has released two solo albums and collaborated with numerous musicians, including former Luscious Jackson keyboardist Vivian Trimble. They wrote and produced the album *Dusty Trails*, an homage to classic film soundtracks that includes a song written for and sung by country-rock legend Emmylou Harris. They also wrote music for the feature films PIGGIE, written and directed by BUFFALO 66 co-writer Alison Bagnall, and HAPPY ACCIDENTS, written and directed by Brad Anderson.

OLIVIER KAEMPFER – Executive Producer

BAFTA-nominated producer Olivier founded the London-based independent production company Parkville Pictures in 2007, whose films have gone on to receive a string of international awards and nominations. Olivier's first feature project BORROWED TIME, made as part of the Film London and BBC Films' award-winning 'Microwave' production scheme, premiered at the 66th Edinburgh International Film Festival 2012 where it was selected as 'BEST OF THE FEST'. BORROWED TIME was released in the UK theatrically and on demand in September 2013 via a Direct Distribution model, having successfully been the first in the UK to raise its distribution budget via crowdfunding platform Kickstarter, and gaining further funding from the British Film Institute (BFI)'s 'New Models' P&A Fund. In Spring 2014, Olivier will go into production on SPACESHIP, his second feature as Producer. Written and directed by Alex Taylor, SPACESHIP is being made as part of the iFeatures feature production fund, in partnership with Creative England, BFI, and BBC Films.

KATIE MUSTARD – Executive Producer

Katie has worked as a Producer and Line Producer for the past twelve years and has overseen the production of 28 feature films. Katie's most recent short film, EVE, premiered at the 2008 VENICE FILM FESTIVAL and was directed by Natalie Portman, starring Lauren Bacall, Ben Gazzara, and Olivia Thirlby. As a feature producer, Katie has overseen production of numerous films, including THE MISSING PERSON (Michael Shannon & Amy Ryan), MADE IN CHINA (winner BEST FEATURE at SXSW Film Festival 2009), THE GREATEST (Pierce Brosnan & Susan Sarandon), and THE SON OF NO ONE (Al Pacino, Katie Holmes, Ray Liotta, & Channing Tatum). In January of 2011, Katie had her eighth film premiere at the Sundance Film Festival with RESTLESS CITY, most recently, she premiered THE DEVIL INSIDE which topped the box office scales as the largest grossing genre film of its time.

PARKVILLE PICTURES

Founded in 2007, Parkville Pictures is a BAFTA-nominated and award-winning independent film production company based in London, UK. Having previously been awarded support by the UK Film Council's 'New Cinema Fund' for its internationally successful slate of short films, Parkville Pictures' first feature BORROWED TIME was funded as part of Film London/BBC Films' award-winning 'Microwave' production scheme. BORROWED TIME was released theatrically in the UK in September 2013, becoming the first film in the UK to successfully raise distribution funding via crowd-funder Kickstarter, before securing further funding for its innovative distribution approach through the British Film Institute's 'New Models' P&A fund. APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR is Parkville Pictures' second feature, and their third, SPACESHIP, will go into production in Spring 2014 with funding from Creative England, BBC Films and the BFI via the 'iFeatures' scheme.