JOONAM

World Premiere in the U.S. Documentary Competition Section
at the 2023 Sundance Film Festival

Directed, Edited, and Cinematography by Sierra Urich
Featuring Behjat Samimi, Mitra Samimi-Urich, and Sierra Urich
Produced by Keith Wilson (I Didn’t See You There) and Sierra Urich
Supervising Editor Maya Daisy Hawke
Associate Produced by Sasha Leitmann

RT: 100 minutes

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LOG LINE

Spurred by a provocative family memory and a lifetime of separation from the country her mother left behind, a young filmmaker delves into her mother and grandmother's complicated pasts, and her own fractured Iranian identity.

SYNOPSIS

Filmmaker Sierra Urich grew up in rural Vermont, a place and an upbringing far removed from Iran, the homeland of her mother, Mitra, and grandmother, Behjat. Only knowing Iran through family stories, food, and holidays, and with the prospect of travel to the country a seemingly impossible dream, she embarks on a personal quest to make sense of her fractured Iranian identity. Navigating barriers of language and culture (not to mention the complications of geopolitical conflict and displacement), Sierra turns to Mitra and Behjat to construct a deeply moving and sometimes disarmingly funny portrait of three generations of women and their complex relationship to an Iran of the past.

Named for a Farsi term of endearment, Joonam is infused with humor and heart like only a film about family could be. Interrogating family history and memory, including her grandmother’s experiences as a preteen bride and her mother’s rebellious teenage years during the Iranian Revolution, Sierra Urich constructs a rich, personal film that poignantly reflects the experiences of the Iranian diasporic community and speaks to anyone affected by the dislocation that accompanies immigration.
FILM PARTICIPANTS & FAMILY BACKGROUND

Mitra Samimi-Urich left for college in 1979 (right before the 1979 Islamic Revolution and before knowing that she wouldn't be able to return). Behjat Samimi was finally allowed to leave Iran in the 1990s (with the intention to be with her children). Mitra and Behjat did not flee immediately following the 1979 Islamic Revolution, nor were they considered refugees.

SIERRA URYCH
Sierra Urich grew up in a small town nestled in the foothills of Vermont’s Green Mountains. Raised by her Persian mother and American-born father, she grew up speaking English (never learning her mother’s native language.) Her connection to her Iranian identity was limited to food, holidays, and old family photographs. She was four years old when she met her grandparents for the first time. She has never been to Iran.

MITRA SAMIMI-URICH
Mitra Samimi-Urich, came to the United States in 1979 to attend college shortly after the Shah was ousted from power during the Iranian Revolution. Two months into her studies, the Islamic Republic came to power, effectively preventing Mitra from returning to Iran. She would not see her parents again for sixteen years. To this day she has not returned to Iran since leaving as a young woman.

BEHJAT SAMIMI
Behjat Samimi (1932-2022) was born in Ardabil, Iran. At age twelve she met a young soldier, who she would marry two years later. After raising her children in the city of Isfahan, she retired to the countryside on a small farm with her husband (who the family lovingly called Papa). In the years after the 1979 Revolution, Behjat and Papa attempted to reunite with their children and grandchildren in the United States, but were prevented from doing so by the Islamic Republic for sixteen years.
DIRECTOR’S STATEMENT

“We can’t go to Iran, it’s too dangerous. Maybe one day the political situation will get better.”

As a child I took this family refrain at face value. Growing up in rural Vermont in an English-speaking household, my mother’s memories were the only window I had to understand my cultural identity. Visiting Iran was never on the table, and because of that, I grew up without much connection to it. My father was American, my friends were American, and I was American. The fact that my mother was from “Persia” as she preferred me to say, an ancient empire absent from modern maps, was just a fun fact that made me feel exotic and mysterious. But in reality, for me Iran was just food and holidays– anything more was out of reach. Joonam was born out of my deep, dormant, and unresolved desire to feel connected to Iran.

Today Iran is on the cusp of another revolution, and this time the fight for freedom is being led by women and girls. These last several months I have been glued to the news and my social media feed, moved by the images of resistance and unimaginable bravery coming out of the country, and heartbroken to witness the horrific crackdown against young people asking for basic human rights. Iranians are fighting not only to liberate a country, but also an entire culture. And for Iranians living in the diaspora, this has seismic implications. The yearning that compelled me to make this film was born from the same profound desire– a longing to inherit more than exile from our families, a longing for home, a longing for our very identities.
ABOUT THE FILM TEAM

SIERRA URICH (Director/ Cinematographer/Editor/Producer/Film Subject)
Sierra Urich is a Persian-American interdisciplinary visual artist and filmmaker based in Vermont. She received her Bachelor of Fine Arts in Illustration and Film from the Rhode Island School of Design in 2013. She was an artist-in-residence at The Banff Centre for the Arts 2017, Sundance Nonfiction Directors Fellow 2018, and Points North Fellow 2018, Firelight Doc Lab Fellow 2021, and Chicken & Egg Eggcelerator Lab Fellow 2022. Joonam is her first feature film.

KEITH WILSON (Producer)
Keith Wilson is a producer, director and artist based in Athens, Georgia whose films have screened at Sundance, the Berlinale, Hot Docs, the U.S. National Gallery of Art, documenta14, and the Museum of Modern Art. He is the producer of I Didn’t See You There (2022) by Reid Davenport, which won the Directing Award for U.S. Documentary at Sundance, the Grand Jury Prize at Full Frame, and was nominated for a Gotham and Film Independent Spirit Award. Keith currently teaches in the Entertainment & Media Studies Department at the University of Georgia, has an MFA in film production from the Radio-TV-Film Department at UT-Austin, and grew up on a cul-de-sac in suburban Atlanta.

MAIDA LYNN (Executive Producer)
Maida Lynn is the founder of Facet, a philanthropic fund that supports creatively ambitious documentary filmmaking. The feature documentary she produced, PAHOKEE, premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in 2019. Films she executive produced include Sam Green’s live documentary, A Thousand Thoughts (Sundance 2017), The Hottest August (True/False Film Fest 2019), and Truth or Consequences (International Film Festival Rotterdam 2020).

MAYA DAISY HAWKE (Supervising Editor)
Maya Daisy Hawke is an editor and artist whose editing credits include double 2022 Sundance Film Festival Audience award winner Navalny (CNN films), Freedom Fields (2017), and Werner Herzog’s Cave of Forgotten Dreams. Her own projects include Currency of Despair (2014), Box of Birds (2016) and Unfated Yet, presented live at Museum of the Moving Image NYC (2020) and Stupeur Narcissique, LACMA (2020). She is co-director (with Joe Bini) of Little Ethiopia, a live documentary, performed at the Sundance Film Festival, Museum of the Moving Image NYC’s First Look (2019), in London at ICA Frames of Representation (2018) and online at IDFA (2020). She premiered a new live cinema piece, Capture Mode, at First Look at Museum of the Moving Image NYC 2021. She works worldwide as an editorial consultant with Rough Cut Service. She was a 2018 Sundance Nonfiction Directors Residency Fellow, an Advisor at the Sundance Edit and Story Lab 2018, an Advisor at the Sundance New Frontiers Story Lab 2019 and 2020, an Advisor to the Sundance Art of Editing Fellowship 2020 and a 2021/22 Sundance Art of Practice fellow.

SASHA LEITMANN (Associate Producer)
Sasha Leitmann is a documentary producer and editor based in the Bay Area. She most recently associate produced I Didn't See You There (2022) by Reid Davenport, winner of the Directing Award for US Documentary at Sundance and Grand Jury Prize at Full Frame. She was the associate producer and assistant editor for the National Endowment for the Arts' "Roots of American Culture 2022" series, and
co-produced *The Big Scary “S” Word* (2020), a documentary directed by Yael Bridge about the history and resurgence of socialism in American politics. Sasha has edited union campaign videos for Time of Day Media and previously worked as Production Coordinator at Robert Reich’s Inequality Media. She graduated with a BA in Art History from Reed College.
Featuring
Sierra Urich
Mitra Samimi-Urich
Behjat Samimi
Gary Urich
Einollah Samimi
Anonymous Farsi Tutor 1
Anonymous Farsi Tutor 2
Bebe
Venus Junchalong

Directed by
Sierra Urich

Produced by
Keith Wilson
Sierra Urich

Executive Produced by
Maida Lynn
Ruth Ann Harnisch
Bill Harnisch

Cinematography by
Sierra Urich

Edited by
Sierra Urich

Supervising Editor
Maya Daisy Hawke

Associate Produced by
Sasha Leitmann

Consulting Producer
Lisa Remington

Fiscal Sponsor
Women Make Movies

Color
Natacha Ikoli

DI Facility
Nice Dissolve

DI Supervisor
Pierce Varous
Post sound services provided by Gigantic Studios

Tristan Baylis  Re-recording mixer & Supervising sound editor
Jesse Peterson  Sound effects editor
Billy Orrico  Dialogue editor
Kevin Wilson  Studio Manager

Foley services provided by Alchemy Post Sound

Supervising Foley Editor  Chris White
Foley Artist  Leslie Bloome
  Shaun Brennan
  Curtis Henderson
Foley Mixer  Ryan Collison
  Connor Nagy
Consulting Editor  Mary Lampson
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  Carla Gutierrez
  Gabriela Pena
  Picho Garcia
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  Fiona Otway
  Esther Hayes
  S & MR
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### Music

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<th>Performer</th>
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<td>Sleep</td>
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<td>For the Love</td>
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<td>Sazo Avaz Santour</td>
<td>Composed by Mohammadreza Dastghad</td>
<td>Arranged by Jamal Sadat &amp; the Ghoghnous Music Ensemble Vocals by Vahid Taj</td>
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<td>Cactus</td>
<td>Composed by Sam Griffin Owens</td>
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<td>Loveboat Bossa</td>
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<td>Awesome Journey</td>
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<td>Rock Blues Guitar</td>
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<td>Raftam</td>
<td>Written and Performed by Taraneh Enterprises Inc. Performed by Marziah Published by Taraneh Enterprises Inc.</td>
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Special Thanks

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Brian Shevrin    Eugene Kolb  Michael Premo    Radu Ciorniciuc
Mom & Dad        Amanda Spain  Esther Hayes    Maricarmen Merino Mora
Leah Giblin      Sara Nodjoumi  Iva Dimitrova    Sabine Fayoux Cantillo
The Samimi Family Anonymous Farsi Tutor 1  Maya Mumma    Nate Venet
Tuna            Anonymous Farsi Tutor 2  S & MR    Rhiannon M. Kim
S & MR          Venus Junchalong  Rahill Jamalifard  Brian W. Bittner
Lauren Domino   Katy Scoggin  Alex Shevrin Venet    Lynn True
Tadashi Nakamura Grandma & Grandpa مامانی و پاباباگ

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