

CHELMSFORD FILM CLUB

An Independent film society based in Chelmsford

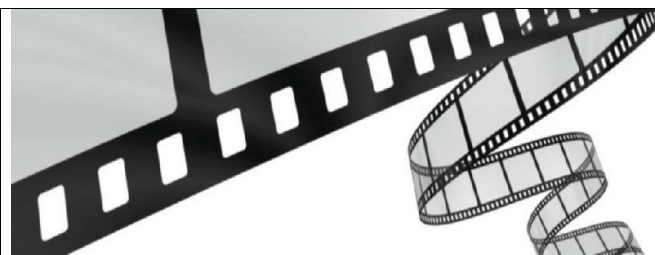
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STARLESS DREAMS

Writer and Director: Mehrdad Oskouei, produced by Oskouei Film Production

Music: Afshin Azizi

Cinematography: Mohammad Hadadi

“Brilliant but painful” declared one notable critic of this relatively short documentary, which took its writer/director nearly seven years to work on before its final realisation. In essence it is a portrait of stolen childhood, plunging the viewer into the lives of seven young teenage girls sharing temporary quarters at a rehabilitation and correction centre on the outskirts of Tehran. Responding to the questions put to them, the girls bond and reveal with disarming and often playful honesty the circumstances and actions which resulted in their imprisonment. One girl killed her father, another robbed a bank, while another was arrested for carrying 651 grams of cocaine. And so on.

Dear reader, were you aware that there is such an event as the ‘Inconvenient Films Festival’ held in Lithuania? Last October ‘*Starless Dreams*’ was on its programme, and if any film can claim to qualify as ‘inconvenient’ then it is surely this one. Judging from the Wikipedia site, it has been screened at just about every film festival around the world during 2016-17 and has won more than 22 awards.

So, painful to watch, maybe, the pain even “dripping from the walls of the homes” as a reviewer put it. But this documentary is not a “cavalcade of misery”. With the girls’ confinement comes safety from their domestic dangers and, with a roomful of similarly aged girls from common backgrounds, the rare chance for friendship and fun.

The theme of this movie is essentially ‘empathy’, and possibly ‘simplicity’. Stephen Holden of *The New York Times* wrote that “Roger Ebert once called the movies ‘a machine that generates empathy,’ and *Starless Dreams*... is just such a machine. With the conceptual rigour and emotional directness associated with the best of Iranian cinema, Oskouei simply listens to the stories of those who have never been listened to before.” Another American critic suggested that “*Starless Dreams* is the perfect example of how powerful simplicity can be when it’s underpinned by compassion for its subject.”

I hope you, the viewer, will agree that this work is engaging, empathetic, absorbing, funny and not too painful to watch. If there is pain, then the compensation is that it is relatively short at just around 76 minutes. Due this shortness we have invited a young, local film maker, **Adam King**, to bring along a couple of his very short films which will begin the evening’s programme. The films are each only 2-3 minutes long and we very much hope that Adam will be able to take questions and comments from the audience before we go on to watch ‘*Starless Dreams*’.

Our next screening is ‘**Paterson**’, 118 minutes, on Wednesday 13 December.

CFC would be grateful for any of your unwanted books, CDs and DVDs which you think might be 'saleable'. And do bring a 'guest' to what will be a very entertaining Jim Jarmusch movie.