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## Salaam Cinema

**Mohsen Makhmalbaf**

IRAN, 1995

75 minutes ■ Colour/35mm  
Production Company: **Green Film House**

Executive Producer: **Amir Lavasani**  
Producer: **Abbas Randjbar**  
Screenplay: **Mohsen Makhmalbaf**  
Cinematographer: **Mahmoud Kalari**  
Editor: **Mohsen Makhmalbaf**  
Sound: **Nezam Kiyāi**  
Music: **Shahrdad Rohani**  
Principal Cast: **Azadeh Zangeneh, Maryam Keyhan, Feyzolah Ghashghai, Shaghayegh Djodat**

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*Salaam Cinema* was made as a birthday gift for cinema on its centenary. Director Mohsen Makhmalbaf places an advertisement in Tehran, saying he wants 100 actors and actresses for a new film, and will be holding auditions. One thousand application forms are printed, but 5,000 people turn up at the beginning of the film. A riot results, and people are trampled. The auditions themselves are much more orderly, making up the rest of the film. Some are amusing, some sad, and some a surreal mix of the two.

Nearly everyone, it seems, wants to be a movie star (although one woman says she merely wants to go to the Cannes film festival for free). Some think they look like Paul Newman or Marilyn Monroe, although none actually do. People sing, or dance, or show off altogether stranger talents. Most of the film – but not all – is unscripted, and Makhmalbaf plays with perceptions of the cinema in relation to truth. The director seems a dictator – not always gentle, not always fair – and so Makhmalbaf encourages a discussion of the director's role in filmmaking. As the picture progresses, something else occurs: we begin to hear the voices of the Iranian people. Intellectuals, students, men, boys, and even women – a group it's truly unusual to hear from in Iranian film – talk about their lives and reflect on themselves.

Without exception, the candidates also talk about the important place of the cinema in everyday life. As with most Iranian films, *Salaam Cinema* blurs the line between illu-

sion and documentary, passing back and forth between fact and fiction. Above all, the film is charming, sly and full of wit.

■ **Dimitri Eipides**

**Mohsen Makhmalbaf** was born in 1957 in Tehran, Iran. He left school to support his family at 15, and soon joined an anti-Shah militant group. He was arrested for an attack on a police station when he was 17, and wasn't freed from prison until the Islamic Revolution in 1979. He wrote a novel and several short stories, and helped found the Centre for the Propagation of Islamic Thought and Arts in 1981. Though he'd never seen a film before, he directed his first feature, *Nasoooh's Repentance*, in 1982. Films include: *Nasoooh's Repentance* (82), *Two Sightless Eyes* (83), *Boycott* (84), *The Peddler* (86), *The Cyclist* (88), *Marriage of the Blessed* (89), *Time of Love* (90), *Nights on Zayandeh Rud* (90), *Once Upon a Time, Cinema* (91) and *Salaam Cinema* (95).

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