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# SALAM CINEMA

(IRANIAN — DOCUDRAMA)

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A Green Film House presentation. Produced by Abbas Randjbar. Executive producer, A. Lavasani.

Directed, written by Mohsen Makhmalbaf. Camera (color), Mahmoud Kalari; editor, Makhmalbaf; music, Shahrzad Rohani; sound, Nizan Kiyai. Reviewed at Cannes Film Festival (Un Certain Regard), May 22, 1995. Running time: 75 MIN.

With: Azadeh Zangeneh, Maryam Keyhan, Feyzolah Ghashghai, Shaghayegh Djodat.

**P**aying tribute to the 100th anniversary of the movies in "Salam Cinema," director Mohsen Makhmalbaf fashions a delightful, verite-like birthday card out of the auditions for a film we never see. Witty and slyly resonant, the simple premise turns into a reflexive treat that should score solidly in fests and select arthouse sites.

Iranian filmmakers have made a specialty of treading the line between fiction and reality, especially where moviemaking itself is involved, and Makhmalbaf plays that up here. Pic opens outside a house where an unexpected crowd of 5,000 has shown up to try for roles in Makhmalbaf's latest production. A riot ensues, although things become quieter once the action shifts inside where Makhmalbaf and his crew film a steady procession of applicants.

Virtually all the auditioners are amateurs, and their turns before the camera seem to be the real thing, although whether some scripting was involved is one of the intriguing questions pic leaves in its wake. Much of what we see plays like wry, real-life comedy, with the thesp hopefuls singing, miming being gunned down and proclaiming their supposed similarities to the likes of Marilyn Monroe and Paul Newman.

When Makhmalbaf probes their reasons for auditioning, the responses mostly confirm the obvious: Everyone fancies himself a movie star. Among the few exceptions, one young woman confides that she simply wants a trip to the Cannes Film Festival.

While the conceit's repetitive nature means a few thin moments, pic has ample charm as well as a discreet dramatic structure, which touches obliquely on some serious issues. Makhmalbaf poses the director as a gentle tyrant destined to disappoint most who come under his sway, a self-analysis that allows both personal and political readings.

This dark edge ends up giving extra dimension to a pic that, while far slighter, belongs alongside "Day for Night" as a fond, knowing tribute to the cinema's alluring illusions. —Godfrey Cheshire