



Circumstance

Score:

97

Director:

Maryam Keshavarz

Cast:

Nikohl Boosheri, Sarah Kazemy, Reza Sixo Safai

Running Time:

105 Minutes

Rated:

NR

Author(s):

Corey Hiscocks

No point in beating around the bush: *Circumstance* is the best film I've seen at Sundance. First time feature writer/director Maryam Keshavarz has crafted a breathtaking, sensual and important work of art; a film of the highest order and a masterful first stroke.

Circumstance is about two young Iranian women, Atafeh and Shireen, eager to abandon the cultural taboos of their world and live boldly. In the midst of a nation that can't understand them, they begin to fall in love with each other. At the same time, Atafeh's brother, Mehran, returns from drug rehabilitation and commits his life to Islam, ready to protect the traditions and morals of its belief system, whatever the cost. As they drift farther and farther away from each other, relationships between the three grow more strained and the family begins to unravel.

The cinematography in *Circumstance* is its most distinguishing characteristic. The film is gorgeous from first frame to last, a canvas of astonishing lighting, tight framing and bold colors. In retrospect, there are several standout scenes, including a slow-motion family game of volleyball on the beach and the Babel-esque disorientation of the club scenes. To highlight only a few, though, is to slight the movie, there is beauty in every shot.

The performances are phenomenal as well. Reza Sixo Safai marvelously captures Rehman's slow descent from regret into obsession, Sarah Kazemy is somehow simultaneously innocent and seductive and Nikohl Boosheri is a revelation of the most exciting kind - staggeringly talented and subtly reserved.

Circumstance is without a doubt one of this year's highlights, featuring stellar breakout performances and particularly brilliant direction. It's an early masterpiece from a cast and director we'll be seeing more of in the coming years.