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Presents

THE STONING OF SORAYA M.



Directed by
CYRUS NOWRASTEH

Starring
SHOHREH AGHDASHLOO
MOZHAN MARNÒ
and
JIM CAVIEZEL

Running Time: 114 Minutes

Rating: Check for Classification

Based on the book "The Stoning of Soraya M." by
FREIDOUNE SAHEBJAM



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THE STONING OF SORAYA M.

ABOUT THE FILM

In a world of secrecy, corruption and injustice, a single courageous voice can tell a true story that changes everything.

This is what lies at the heart of the emotionally charged experience of THE STONING OF SORAYA M. Based on an incredible true story, this powerful tale of a village's persecution of an innocent woman becomes both a daring act of witness and a compelling parable about mob rule. Who will join forces with the plot against her, who will surrender to the mob, and who will dare to stand up for what is right. It is both a classic fable of good and evil and an inspiring tribute to the many fighting against injustice all around the world, THE STONING OF SORAYA M. was a rousing runner-up to "Slumdog Millionaire" as the Audience Favorite at the Toronto Film Festival.

Academy Award® nominee Shohreh Aghdashloo ("House of Sand and Fog") stars in the heroic role of Zahra, an Iranian woman with a burning secret. When a journalist (Jim Caviezel, "The Passion Of The Christ," "Déjà Vu") is stranded in her remote village, she takes a bold chance to reveal what the villagers will stop at nothing to keep hidden.

Thus begins the remarkable account of what happened to Soraya (Mozhan Marnò), a kind, spirited woman whose bad marriage leads her cruel, divorce-seeking husband to conspire against her, trumping up charges of infidelity, which carry an unimaginable penalty. Moving through a minefield of scheming, lies and deceit, Soraya and Zahra will attempt to prove Soraya's innocence in a legal system stacked against her. But when all else fails, Zahra will risk everything to use the only weapon she has left – her fearless, passionate voice that can share Soraya's story with a shocked world.

THE STONING OF SORAYA M. is inspired by Paris-based journalist Freidoune Sahebjam's acclaimed international best-seller of the same name which, rife with intrigue and moral outrage, first brought global attention to the real Soraya, who in 1986 was buried to her waist in her hometown square and stoned to death by her fellow villagers.

Director Cyrus Nowrasteh, along with his wife and fellow screenwriter Betsy Giffen Nowrasteh, saw in Soraya one story that stands for thousands of untold tales around the world, from Africa to Asia, from Europe to America, wherever people are battling prejudice and injustice. Their screenplay takes the hard facts surrounding Soraya's fate and carves from them a lyrical, fable-like passion play that gets under the skin by posing a provocative question: who among us would throw stones and who would take a stand against them?

THE STONING OF SORAYA M.

ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

“At its heart, this movie is a human drama filled with tension, peril and hope – but it is also a true story that I felt strongly had to be told, a story the whole world needs to know.”

-- Director Cyrus Nowrasteh

A Woman Speaks Out, The Story Begins

It happens every day all over the world. Someone breaks the deafening silence. Someone stands up against injustice, risks her very life to defy a tyrannical government, to battle corruption and deceit, to aid an innocent victim, to tell a shocking story that the world *must* hear to a journalist. And yet, these inspirational, emotionally gripping stories, while often told to journalists, rarely come to the powerful medium of cinema. THE STONING OF SORAYA M. takes one such astonishingly true story – that of a fearless Iranian woman and a probing war correspondent who brought the stoning of a woman by an entire village to the world’s attention – and transforms it into a moving and suspenseful movie parable about how mob rule turns some into villains. . . and a few into courageous heroes who will risk everything to bring hope to others.

The movie comes at a time when the world’s spotlight is focused more intensely than ever on those who have previously been invisible – from slum dwellers to women fighting for their lives and dignity in countries where they still have few rights. So it is perhaps not surprising that THE STONING OF SORAYA M. joined Oscar® winner “Slumdog Millionaire” as the two most popular films among enthusiastic audiences at this year’s Toronto Film Festival. Its subject is incendiary: the thousands of women who are hounded, conspired against and murdered in cold blood around the world for so-called and often trumped-up “crimes of dishonor,” such as adultery or premarital sex. But the film’s treatment is universal, wrapped in a classic, gripping drama of one woman’s danger-fraught quest to bring the conniving evildoers in her remote village, who think they are acting with impunity, to global disgrace.

The journey of making this daring film that raises so many provocative personal and international questions for all who see it began when director Cyrus Nowrasteh read Freidoune Sahebjam’s flammable international best-seller, The Stoning of Soraya M., first published in 1994. Sahebjam’s powerful writing unfolded the true tale of Zahra Khanum, a woman in Iran who, in bold defiance of threats and local authorities, secretly came to him to confide that her niece Soraya had just shockingly been murdered in the village square with the entire town participating in the ancient ritual of stoning.

Sahebjam went on to investigate the extraordinary story of Soraya’s life and unjust death. He pieced together a blistering account of how her husband, having fallen in love with another girl (indeed a 14 year-old), conspired with the local mullah, himself a former criminal and con man, to accuse Soraya of infidelity.

The evidence was flimsy and largely fabricated and in the proceedings that ensued, everything was stacked against Soraya. Her fellow villagers joined in on the scheme, some driven by their own agendas, others forced by coercion and blackmail. Then, despite the lack of any real proof, and without a chance to defend herself, an all-male tribunal declared Soraya guilty and ordered her executed under the dictates of ancient law, setting in motion an extraordinary, chillingly primal tradition on Soraya's fateful last day.

The story might have ended there on Soraya's fateful last day, as it has for all too many, but for the guts and valor of the villager Zahra, who made sure Soraya's death would become part of a larger battle for justice.

Nowrasteh was riveted by the story – filled with moral outrage at what had been done to Soraya by her neighbors and family and moved deeply by the bravery it must have taken for Zahra to come forth and inform the world of this travesty of justice. He saw the story as simultaneously profoundly cinematic and deeply important.

“When I read the book, I thought, if this is really happening all over the world, someone needs to shine a light on it, somehow the world has to become more aware of it,” Nowrasteh recalls.

Indeed, though the book was published more than a decade ago and centered on the specific situation in newly fundamentalist, post-Revolutionary Iran, the scourge of stoning and other singularly brutal punishments of women (including whippings, burnings and beheadings) continue today in many countries across the globe. Due to the secrecy and remoteness of these events, accurate statistics are hard to come by, but reports suggest that there have been at least 1000 women stoned to death, primarily for marital or sexual violations, in a number of countries – including Iran, Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan, Iraq, United Arab Emirates, Afghanistan and Pakistan -- over the last 15 years. In addition, the United Nations estimates that some 5,000 women each year, including in the U.S., become victims of so-called “honor killings,” in which family members kill a woman who has allegedly brought dishonor on them through such acts as dressing provocatively or engaging in illicit sex.

Nowrasteh felt that Soraya's story could help bring this hidden reality to the fore. At the same time, he was struck by the universal power of the story as a mythic tale of husbands and wives, good and evil, the insidious nature of silence and the unstoppable strength of moral fury. “At its core this is a story that is very relatable, because it is about a conflict between a man and a woman and you connect to the characters in an emotional way as husband and wife,” says Nowrasteh. “These situations take place all the time all over the world. Some people have even compared Soraya and her husband, Ali, to O.J. and Nicole Simpson. But the difference is that in this hyped-up environment, Ali was able to use the religious legal system to have Soraya executed by her village simply because he wanted to take another wife.”

The way in which a personal marital struggle becomes a public battle of good and evil further fascinated Nowrasteh, bringing to mind classic movies like “The Ox-Bow Incident,” the 1940s Western that grapples with questions of justice as a posse turns into a lynching party, and such powerful fantasy stories as Shirley Jackson's “The Lottery,” in which a small town stones to death a single, randomly

picked person each year to assure a good harvest. With *THE STONING OF SORAYA M.* Nowrasteh saw the potential to create a broader work of entertainment that puts the audience in the position of asking themselves: *what would I do in this situation?*

“What intrigued me is that, as in movies like ‘The Oxbow Incident,’ you have a situation in this Iranian village where righteousness snowballs as more and more people get caught up in it,” says Nowrasteh. “When that happens, first reason gets lost and then soon after, humanity gets left behind. At the same time, there is often someone who will stand up against the odds and try to bring people back to their senses. In Soraya’s story, that heroine is Zahra.”

He continues: “I saw her as being almost like Gary Cooper in ‘High Noon.’ She is the character who truly has strength in her convictions, who becomes the would-be protector of the innocent. And, even if she cannot save Soraya, she provides a real sense of hope for the future. Without Zahra, this story would have been too tragic to make into a film. But her triumph, her willingness to break the silence becomes something that inspires us all.”

Even though Nowrasteh was fired up to make a movie of Soraya’s story, it would ultimately take not just his passion but considerable stores of patience. Relatively unknown when he first read the book, Nowrasteh had few resources to convince a production company to take a major risk on such a potentially controversial and tricky subject. “At the time I read the book, I knew it would be difficult to ever get this movie made. But I always hung on to the idea of it,” he says.

Meanwhile, Nowrasteh continued building an impressive directorial career specializing in entertaining, relevant docudramas drawn from current events. He served as writer and director on “The Day Reagan Was Shot” and as writer of “10,000 Black Men Named George” for the Showtime Network. For each film, Nowrasteh was the recipient of the prestigious PEN Literary Award – the first time that a single writer had won in the same category two years in a row. He followed that by contributing an episode of Steven Spielberg’s fact-based mini-series “Into the West” for TNT. Then, in 2006, Cyrus became a national figure as the writer and producer of the acclaimed and controversial ABC docudrama, “The Path to 9/11,” which aired on September 10th and 11th, 2006, to an audience of 28 million viewers.

Still, throughout all the success, the story of Soraya and Zahra continued to draw him, as it did his co-screenwriter wife, Betsy Giffen Nowrasteh. “There are not many books that you remember page by page but *The Stoning of Soraya M.* was one of those,” Betsy recalls. “It was so powerful –a simple, but profound story that we couldn’t let go.”

The potential costs of tackling such a sensitive story were all too clear to the Nowrastehs, but after “The Path to 9/11,” they were ready to take it on. “We had been through death threats once before with another movie Cyrus did,” explains Betsy. “But now that our kids are adults, we felt it was our lives to risk. We did not want to let fear dictate what we wanted to pursue or to in any way impact what we thought was right.”

Adds Cyrus: “A part of me still felt that never in a million years would this movie get made, but it was Betsy’s belief that kept me going.”

Making the decision to move ahead with commitment and discretion, the Nowrastehs began making private enquiries into the rights for the book, little realizing the difficulties in pinning down its elusive author. The son of a former Iranian ambassador, Freidoune Sahebjam had a long history of bold reportage even before he told the story of Soraya M. He had covered Iran's abuses against the country's Baha'i community, as well as the use of underage children in the Iranian Army during the 8-year Iran-Iraq War – which resulted in the decree of a death fatwa by the new Iranian Revolutionary Court. Despite this, he returned to the country incognito to investigate the Tehran Islamic Regime. He later covered the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan for the French daily *Le Telegraph*.

The aging but peripatetic writer was not easy to find, let alone convince that Soraya's story could be done full justice on the screen. "I was finally able to speak to Freidoune on the phone, and I regret to say that my phone conversations with him, of which there were many, were my only personal contact with him. I never met the man in person but it was clear, even over a long-distance connection, that he was a force to be reckoned with: a man of great generosity, spirit and talent," remembers Nowrasteh. "He had been approached by other filmmakers but he had very specific requests. First, that the film be made in Farsi using largely Iranian actors. And second, that the film be directed by someone of Iranian background. I felt strongly about the same things, so we moved forward. My hope was always to do justice to his book just as his book brought justice to Soraya."

With the rights finally secured, Betsy and Cyrus began their process of shaping the book's searing factual reporting into a tense, terse yet lyrical movie-going experience that takes audiences into a world they've never experienced before.

From Real-Life Conspiracy to Movie Parable: The Adaptation

From the beginning, Cyrus and Betsy made the decision to focus the tale's suspense around Zahra, the savvy, outraged village woman who attempts to protect Soraya and ultimately tells her story in the hopes of saving others. Her quest for truth and justice amidst lies, betrayal and fraud became the driving force of the story. Meanwhile, Soraya and her accusers were etched as the two opposite poles of innocence and corruption between which each of the villagers must make a choice.

As they wrote, the Nowrastehs compacted the actual events into a grippingly tight time frame. "It's a ticking time-bomb story so we really wanted to concentrate the drama," says Cyrus. "We always saw it as the story of an accusation, trial and execution that occur all in one day. Likewise, Zahra tells her story all in one day, heightening the tension."

The Nowrastehs stayed true to the real-life characters, but Sahebjam's portrait of the men in the village was so unremittingly villainous that the couple actually worked to add more shading to characters and to more broadly reflect how different people react under the extreme peer pressure of mob rule.

"Frankly, we humanized many of the male characters to show their inner conflicts and dilemmas, whereas in the book they are all evil to the core," explains Cyrus. "We wanted the mayor, Ebrahim, to be

a man caught in a changing time, who knows that the ultimate authority is now the Mullah, and despite his better judgment will do whatever he must to maintain his political position. With Hashem, we gave him the afflicted son to put him in more of a bind, because it's so hard to understand why he would testify against Soraya, to understand the kind of male unity that goes on in such villages from birth and the ways in which people are discouraged from ever defying the group.”

Some of the most seemingly fanciful scenes came straight from reality, including the playful traveling circus that shows up in the midst of Soraya's execution day. “Of course, people ask if we invented that circus, but it's very much in the book,” notes Cyrus. “My jaw dropped when I read about it. There's something so Felliniesque about it, so surreal, that it could only have really happened that way.”

The Nowrastehs maintained their commitment in the screenplay to have the characters speak in Iran's native Farsi. “One of the things we always felt was important stylistically was to really bring audiences into this Iranian village, to have a very raw, human, immediate quality to the surroundings,” says Cyrus. “We fought for the film to be shot entirely in Farsi, despite the challenges, because I always felt that actors speaking English in an Iranian village would take people out of what was happening, would detract from the authentic and the pure emotional response as the scheme against Soraya builds. Of course, we understood that it was going to take a production company willing to take a considerable risk if we were going to be able to make the film.”

Enter Mpower Pictures: A Movie Company With A Mission

Finding the right producing team happened faster than Cyrus Nowrasteh ever dreamed. The script wound up in the hands of John Shepherd, President of Mpower Pictures, the company started by Stephen McEveety, Shepherd and Todd Burns with a compelling mission: to make films that profoundly impact culture and empower audiences through high entertainment value. Shepherd felt THE STONING OF SORAYA M. encapsulated all those qualities, and he brought it to CEO McEveety's attention.

“John kept saying you really have to read this script,” recalls McEveety, “and when I finally did, I was blown away. My first thoughts were two-fold: I wondered ‘who in the heck is going to finance this story?’ and I simultaneously knew it was a story that absolutely *had* to be told.”

McEveety is no stranger to risky, provocative filmmaking. As an executive at ICON collaborating closely with Mel Gibson, his films as executive producer include not only the Oscar®-winning “Braveheart,” “We Were Soldiers” and “What Women Want,” but he also produced one of the most intensely media-covered productions of all time: “The Passion of the Christ.” For McEveety, the power of a good story has always been worth some jeopardy – and Soraya's story was a prime example of a story that called for courage in the telling.

“This is a story that will mean different things to different people and can be talked about on many different levels,” he notes. “For me, it struck a universal theme, about how human beings abuse one

another – especially how women are abused around the world – and about how too often most step aside and let it happen. I hope it serves to create a desire for justice and protection of the innocent in all walks of life, and in all parts of the world. Personally, I get angry every time I watch the movie, but I think it is also empowering for audiences to understand what is really happening. There are bad people in every culture but it is also exhilarating to see there are always those who strive to do the right thing.”

Driven now by his own passion for the subject, McEveety accelerated into high gear. “He managed to set up the financing amazingly quick,” says Nowrasteh, “unlike anything I’ve ever been involved with. I’ve been so glad to be in business with Mpower, because these guys *move*.”

None of the production logistics, from the rugged, far-off location to shooting in Farsi, were the least bit intimidating to McEveety. “Oh, I’ve been down that road before,” he laughs. “In this case, we all agreed that it was essential for audiences to really believe in the world the movie enters, so having the locations and language be authentic was vital. It’s a story that you can’t simply watch – you have to *experience* it and that was the key to making it.”

His overriding production concern, however, was the cast and crew’s safety. “I spoke with each person individually about the dangers, but they already understood,” he explains. “Our cast and crew are brave people who put their lives and careers on the line to make sure this movie would be seen.”

In the end, McEveety says, as strongly as he felt about making the film at the start, the movie’s visceral impact on the screen still took him aback. “It’s a powerful entertainment that packs an epic punch, inside of a tiny, lovingly made film,” he says. “The story is engaging but it’s the artistry of the film and the magnificence of the performances, some of them pure evil and others full of hope and light, that really took me by surprise. We ended up with a movie that you cannot watch without being strongly affected – and that is the true measure of its success.”

It Takes A Village: Assembling The Cast

One of the most stunning things about a stoning is that it takes an entire village to pull it off – it is the only form of execution in which no single person delivers a fatal blow, but the community itself becomes the de facto executioner of one of its own. Fascinated by how this dynamic can come to pass, it was always key for the Nowrastehs to create a group of starkly drawn characters who each wrestle viscerally with the dilemma Ali raises when he decides to falsely accuse Soraya and condemn her.

The casting began with the film’s moral center and ultimate heroine: Zahra, the outspoken village woman who has seen it all, but now dares to break the heavy silence about the plot to execute Soraya. Even while writing the screenplay, Cyrus Nowrasteh always had just one actress in mind for the role: the Academy Award® nominated, Iranian-born star Shohreh Aghdashloo, who came to the fore with her acclaimed, emotionally intense role as an Iranian exile trying to make a new life in America in “The House of Sand and Fog.”

Aghdashloo was immediately drawn to the film's inspirational themes of fighting the injustice against women that goes unseen all around the world. She says: "I'd just love for this film to be shown in each and every country on the face of the earth. That's what I'm hoping for. This film is not really at all about Iranians -- the characters could be Egyptian, they could be from Yemen or Somalia. This is an international subject matter that needs to be seen everywhere on the planet."

The actress also could not resist the character of Zahra, who becomes the kind of valiant woman hero rarely seen on the screen. "One of the reasons that I wanted to play her was, before Zahra, I kept playing the voiceless woman," notes Aghdashloo. "I never got to play the woman with the courage to do what Zahra is doing. Her strength is what most attracted me to the project. I think this is a chance to show that there are many women in this world who are not voiceless because they refuse to stay silent."

Aghdashloo's early passion for the role and the story spread throughout the production. "Shohreh became the leader of this incredible cast," says Nowrasteh. "I approached her before I even knew the producers at Mpower because it was so important that we have the right person for Zahra."

Meanwhile to play Soraya, whose sweetness and dignity belie the incomprehensible death sentence she is given, Nowrasteh chose Mozhan Marnò, an Iranian-American who has earned degrees from Barnard College at Columbia University and the Yale School of Drama. Marnò has been seen in such films as "Charlie Wilson's War" and "Traitor," but had never taken on a role of such intensity. She took the challenge to heart.

"If you're going to tell this story, then you have to really tell it," she says. "I liked that Cyrus and Betsy were not at all shying away from anything."

Marnò also felt an immediate kinship with Soraya, despite their very different lives. "I feel that if I had been born in a different circumstance, Soraya could easily have been me. You don't really know what your life would be like, what your worries and dreams would be, if you were born into a village with no money and no resources. So I think from the beginning I just felt an enormous amount of empathy toward this character. It wasn't hard to put myself in her circumstances."

Cyrus was particularly impressed by the depth and commitment put into the relationship between his two lead performers: "There was a beautiful chemistry that developed between Shohreh and Mozhan that also inspired some moments in the film. For example, at the hotel where we were staying, in the restaurant one night, the actors were singing. As I listened, I thought to myself 'I need to have that in the movie.' So I went to Shohreh and said I need a song, here's where I want it. You can see what they came up with. It's amazing. That was not scripted. The two of them came up with that and it was perfect."

One of the trickiest roles to cast turned out to be the journalist Sahebjam. Repeated attempts to cast the part had failed to produce an actor with suitable gravitas to make a strong impact in a brief amount of screen time. Then, at the last moment, the Hollywood actor Jim Caviezel, recently seen with Denzel Washington in the thriller "Déjà Vu," stepped in. "We spent months searching for the right Freidoune," recalls Unit Production Manager and Line Producer Stephen A. Marinaccio II. "It was not

until Jim Caviezel expressed interest that Cyrus really felt comfortable. But time was short. Jim dove right in and was able to learn acceptable Farsi within two weeks.”

“As soon I heard about the story, I had to be a part of this movie,” says Caviezel. “A man once said in Auschwitz that indifference is the greatest sin of the 20th Century. Well, I think it is the greatest sin of the 21st Century as well. We need to shake off this indifference, the destructive tolerance of evil. And as an actor, I enjoy sometimes playing smaller roles as well.”

“Jim came in at the last minute and was wonderful to work with,” says Cyrus. “He has a tremendous ear for languages and he handled the Farsi brilliantly. He was committed, focused and delivers a convincing portrayal of a French-Iranian journalist.”

Rounding out the cast is a distinguished group of Iranian-American actors in the roles of the villagers who each make a fateful decision about Soraya’s fate. They include: Navid Negahban as Soraya’s cheating husband Ali; David Diann as the town’s conflicted Mayor, Ebrahim; Ali Pourtash as the false Mullah who wields his power in the case; and Parviz Sayyad as Hashem, the widower who employs Soraya only to find himself trapped into betraying her.

“We completed the cast with seasoned, experienced actors who all shared in common a belief in the material,” says Nowrasteh. “I welcomed their opinions and contributions, especially about Iranian culture. They were given a certain flexibility with the language. I wanted them to put things in their own words and feel comfortable with what to say and how to say it. I gave them a lot of latitude, and I find that when you do that with actors, they in turn give you equal latitude in shaping and directing them. There was a wonderful give and take, and I really couldn’t have asked for a better cast.”

The Secret Shoot: **Journey to an Undisclosed Arab Nation**

With the film moving ahead, Cyrus Nowrasteh was faced with another daunting challenge: finding a location that could authentically stand in for a remote Iranian village and fulfill his criteria for a starkly transporting realism -- all without raising any local controversy. Ultimately, he discovered a discreetly tucked-away hamlet in an undisclosed Arab country in the Middle East that fit the bill.

“We searched all over the world, looking for a village that would serve our story,” he explains. “We saw a lot of standard dry, desert-y, out in the middle of nowhere, Lawrence of Arabia type villages. But finally we found this place in the mountains, a place made primarily out of rocks yet overlooking an incredible valley that gave us just the right feeling culturally and environmentally.”

He continues: “It was very important to me to recreate some of the feeling of the village in the book, to make the place alive enough that it would feel like the characters really belong there. To assure that we did it right, I felt I needed an unimpeachable, indispensable source, someone I could trust implicitly, and being of Iranian heritage, the person I thought of was my father. So he was there the entire time as an advisor to the story.”

Shooting in small, traditional village in some ways so like the one where Soraya lived and fought for her life had a visceral impact on the cast as well, reminding them of the every day lives that take place in a very different reality from that which we know in the United States – and of the basic humanity of all the characters, even those who turn against Soraya as the conflict heats up.

Notes Shohreh Aghdashloo: “The people we worked with in the village were so gentle and helpful. It meant a lot to us, especially with subject matter such as this, to have that atmosphere. You need people to give you love and make you feel happy and welcome. And these villagers did it in such a beautiful way.”

As production shifted into high gear, plans were made for a very important visitor to the clandestine location: Freidoune Sahebjam, whose book started everything. Unfortunately, before he could travel, the ailing Sahebjam passed away in March 2008 at his home in Neuilly-sur-Seine at 75.

“Sadly, or perhaps appropriately, the plan was for him to visit on the very day we were shooting the stoning,” says Cyrus. “But tragically he never saw one frame of the film that his work inspired, nor did we ever get our long-awaited chance to meet. There was much shock and sadness among the cast and crew but his death only strengthened our mission to reflect the courage and artistry he brought to telling this important story for the world.”

How Far Do You Go? **Filming the Stoning**

Cyrus Nowrasteh and Betsy Giffen Nowrasteh had made a vital decision while writing the screenplay for THE STONING OF SORAYA M.: they would reveal Soraya’s experience on the day of her stoning in raw, gritty detail, no holds barred.

For Cyrus, the truth itself was so searing, there could be no other way. “No one had ever shown a stoning on film before so I felt a real responsibility to make it something the audience will never forget,” he states. “The question was always: *how far do you go?* I didn’t want to have anyone mistake what they were seeing for standard, popcorn movie violence but I also didn’t want it to be so graphic that it overwhelmed the audience. The entire scene was carefully designed so that there is a kind of cathartic poetry to it that goes to another level beyond the simple horror of what is happening.”

Nowrasteh followed Sahebjam’s intricately detailed descriptions in the book of how the stoning unfolded and also willed himself to look at chilling, covert footage of real stonings in action. “All I can tell you is that compared to what I saw and read, the scene in the movie is far less graphic than it could have been,” he says. “Stoning does terrible things to the human body, but we didn’t want to focus on that. Most of all, I wanted to capture the whole ritual design of it and how it affects the crowd.”

On the set, the logistics of shooting the scene challenged cast and crew. “We all agreed that the sequence had to be real, powerful, dramatic and stunning,” says line producer Marinaccio, “without ever being sensationalistic. Every shot, every angle was pre-visualized, using every technique possible,

including using puppets, stunt performers, CGI and wire-removal. The entire sequence was plotted out two and half months before we went to camera. The whole thing had more thought put into it than anything I've done on any other movie.”

Adds Nowrasteh: “It was very important to have the camera be very tight on Soraya, so that the audience is really going through this journey with her all the way to her final peace. But the camera, just as importantly, also moves into the crowd where we get a chance to feel their various reactions: the women trying to comfort one another, the men caught up in the mob frenzy. In some ways it was like choreographing a battle sequence. But, in this case, there was no one I could call and say: ‘how do you shoot something like this?’ There was no precedent.”

The scene plays out without much dialogue, carved out of gestures, expressions, camera movements and the random trajectory of the stones themselves, that build to a fever pitch, allowing the audience to be at once participant and witness to the astonishing events. Adding to the experience is Academy Award® nominated composer John Debney’s rich, emotional score.

Although not a single stone was ever actually thrown at Mozhan Marnò (the sequence was ultimately completed with an innovative, budget-defying mix of puppetry and CGI), she found herself deeply affected by portraying the sensations and emotional complications Soraya experiences in her final moments, as she is buried to her waist in the village square and watches the people she has known and cared for all of her life turn against her in a misguided vengeance.

“I didn’t expect the extent to which it would affect me,” she confesses. “These brilliant prosthetic and makeup guys came in and did their wonders and it took, depending on what stage of the stoning we were in, anywhere from one to four and a half hours to get into makeup. They made me progressively look worse and worse. There was something really shocking about it. On the day that I had the worst makeup, Navid (who plays Ali) came on set, and he just sat there and started shaking a bit. Nobody could look me in the face. I couldn’t look at myself.”

She continues: “Then I got into the hole and there were 50 people yelling at me and looking really angry. And all this blood. I just had no idea what it was going to be like -- but for me, it was absolutely horrifying. I would have nightmares at night that people were surrounding me or that I couldn’t breathe. Later, when I saw the scene, I was stunned to see it from the crowd’s perspective. It was just heartbreaking. How could all of these people, people she knows, see Soraya down in the ground, and continue to surround her and stone her?”

“Mozhan’s performance and all the things that went into shooting that scene helped to make for its power,” says Nowrasteh. “You go through stages in watching it: first there’s shock that it’s happening, then disbelief at how the crowd gets caught up in it, then there’s the question of just how far will this go, but finally, there’s a kind of moment where the camera pans to the heavens and you are with Soraya as she transcends what is going on around her. There is a beauty to her dignity amid the chaos.”

The World Will Know:

Bringing Soraya's Story To Global Audiences

Cyrus Nowrasteh had a singular guiding principle throughout the making of THE STONING OF SORAYA M.: *the world will know*. “Yes, the film is a gripping drama,” he says, “but more than that it is a form of bearing witness, much like Zahra does in the movie. It becomes a liberating story about the power of breaking a silence and hopefully will encourage others to add their voices.”

As an Iranian-American whose family was exiled, the story has a personal angle for Cyrus, but it also transcends the specifics of current politics or regimes. “I’m not in a position to change any governments or laws in other countries, but the one thing I can do is to make people aware that this is happening wherever women are still treated as second class citizens. It is hard to conceive of this still going on, but my obligation was to getting the truth out there – again, so the world will know. My biggest hope is that people will fall in love with these women and their courage.”

Betsy Giffen Nowrasteh, also like Zahra, holds onto a strong sense of hope for future change: “Stonings happened in Judaism, crucifixions in Christianity and Catholics had The Inquisition, certainly. But those times are over. They reformed and those religions are stronger than ever. So this isn’t about Islam. It’s about examining a ritual, much like the lynchings that happened in the U.S in a different era, that needs to change, that can change if there is an outcry around the world.”

The Nowrastehs were gratified at the film’s sold-out screenings at the Toronto Film Festival to discover that diverse audiences were drawn to Soraya’s story and that they left the theatre wanting to make a difference. “The screenings were very popular because people were curious about the title,” says Cyrus. “This took us by surprise but even more exciting to us was the way that people really connected to the characters and the story. No matter what the audiences’ background, each person had a very personal reaction to this journey and that is everything we hoped for.”

STONING IN THE 21st CENTURY: **WHAT CAN BE DONE?**

The powerful events depicted in THE STONING OF SORAYA M. are likely to inspire audiences to want to learn more about the issues of stoning, honor killings and the persecution of women around the world. As the first film drama to offer a stirring and eye-opening glimpse into the reality of public stonings, THE STONING OF SORAYA M. has been embraced by advocates for human and women's rights as a way to raise consciousness about the plight of women at risk of abuse, injustice and death in legal systems stacked against them.

Stoning is perhaps the most ancient form of execution, one that has been referred to throughout the historical record, and carried out by member of many different religions in antiquity. In contemporary times, it has been associated with countries of the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa that follow Sharia law, which proposes stoning as a punishment for such offenses as illicit sex and infidelity. (While stoning is more often used against women, men are also still publicly stoned for offenses including adultery and homosexuality.) In some countries, stoning remains part of the official penal code, while in others authorities turn a blind eye to stoning as a local practice. In all cases, the United Nations considers stoning a form of torture.

In 2002, the United States Congress condemned execution by stoning, noting "women around the world continue to be disproportionately targeted for discriminatory, inhuman and cruel punishments." Yet, with too little attention focused on these cases, shocking stories continue to mirror that of Soraya M. in the movie. For example, in 2008, a 13 year-old Somali girl was stoned by 50 men in front of a crowd of 1000 – for the crime of having been raped. The BBC reported that the girl begged for her life, pleading "don't kill me, don't kill me" before being buried in a hole up to her neck. The BBC report continues: "According to Amnesty International, nurses were sent to check during the stoning whether the victim was still alive. They removed her from the ground and declared that she was, before she was replaced so the stoning could continue."

A number of organizations are deeply committed to the fight for the fair and humane treatment of women under all legal systems, including such international groups as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. Additional web resources include:

The Global Campaign to Stop Killing and Stoning Women: www.stop-stoning.org

The International Campaign Against Honour Killings: www.stophonourkillings.com

The International Committee Against Stoning: www.stopstoningnow.com

Stop Stoning Forever (an Iran-based Group): www.meydaan.com/english/default.aspx

KAFA (Lebanese-based Women's Advocacy): www.kafa.org.lb/advoc1.html

The Network Against Honour Related Violence: www.minheder.nu

Revolutionary Association of Women of Afghanistan: www.rawa.org

ABOUT THE CAST

SHOHREH AGHDASHLOO (Zahra)

A prominent actress on both stage and screen, Shohreh Aghdashloo has portrayed a vast array of complex and powerful characters throughout her career, most notably her prodigious performance as 'Nadi' in "House of Sand and Fog," which earned her an Academy Award nomination.

Aghdashloo was most recently seen on the big screen in a featured performance in "The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants 2," alongside America Ferrera, Blake Lively, Amber Tamblyn and Alexis Bledel.

She recently completed work on the BBC/HBO mini-series "House of Saddam," in which she portrays Sadaam Hussein's wife Sajida. The mini-series explores the inner workings of Saddam Hussein's family and his relationship with his closest advisers.

In "The Nativity Story," directed by Catherine Hardwicke, Aghdashloo transformed herself as Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist. The film looks at the life of the Virgin Mary before the birth of Christ, following Mary and Joseph's lives including their relationships with other Biblical characters, such as Elizabeth, who is Mary's cousin. Other notable roles for Aghdashloo include: "The Lake House" starring Sandra Bullock and Keanu Reeves, "American Dreamz" and "X-Men: The Last Stand."

During the 2005-2006 television season, Aghdashloo captured audiences on the small screen as a guest star on two popular television series, "ER" and "Will & Grace." Prior to these appearances she was a critically-acclaimed guest star on Fox's award-winning television drama, "24," opposite Emmy nominated and Golden Globe winning Kiefer Sutherland.

Born in Tehran in 1952 to an intellectual, creative family, Aghdashloo spent her twenties performing in various cutting-edge performance groups, among them the acclaimed Drama Workshop of Tehran. Based upon her work there, Aghdashloo was cast by directors Abbas Kiarostami and Ali Hatami - - two towering figures of the nascent Iranian New Wave -- to play starring roles in 1977's "Gozaresh" and "Sute-Delan."

In the late '70s, Aghdashloo left Iran for London, England, where she earned a degree in international relations. She was on the verge of accepting a position at a newspaper when a friend presented her with a play, called "Rainbow," about the Iranian Revolution and its discontents. Aghdashloo put her journalism career on hold -- for what would turn out to be an indefinite length of time. "Rainbow" was such a success it toured the United States, where Aghdashloo was reunited with Drama Workshop colleague Houshang Touzie. The two married in Los Angeles in the late '80s.

It was her work on film, in topical dramas such as "America So Beautiful" and "Maryam" -- both about the struggle of Iranian immigrants in the U.S -- that caught the attention of director Vadim Perelman, who was looking to cast the supporting role of Nadi in his big-screen adaptation of the bestselling book, "House of Sand and Fog." Aghdashloo's subtle, simmering performance brought her kudos from the Independent Spirit Awards, the New York Film Critics and the Los Angeles Film Critics

associations, all of which named her 2003's Best Supporting Actress. The Academy followed suit, nominating Shohreh as an Oscar® contender.

Having found notoriety in the world of film, Aghdashloo continues to indulge her passion for the stage, working alongside Houshang Touzie to write, perform and produce Farsi language theater for an Iranian audience through her traveling theatre group, Drama Workshop '79.

Aghdashloo currently resides in Los Angeles with her husband and daughter.

JIM CAVIEZEL (Freidoune Sahebjam)

Versatile and intense, Jim Caviezel earned his breakthrough acting role as brooding pacifist Private Witt in Terrence Malick's "The Thin Red Line," alongside Sean Penn, Nick Nolte and Adrien Brody. Over the next few years, he appeared in such films as Ang Lee's Civil War-era Western "Ride With the Devil," and in Gregory Hoblit's ingenious time-twist thriller "Frequency," in which he played a troubled son connecting across two decades of time with his long-dead father, played by Dennis Quaid.

Caviezel co-starred with Jennifer Lopez in "Angel Eyes," playing a mysterious amnesiac with a secret connection to Lopez's character. He followed that with widely disparate turns as the wrongly convicted Edmond Dantes in Kevin Reynolds's adaptation of the Dumas' classic "The Count of Monte Cristo," and as a war hero wrestling with a murder charge in Carl Franklin's courtroom drama "High Crimes," with Morgan Freeman and Ashley Judd.

It could be said that Caviezel's role in the box office phenomenon "The Passion of the Christ" is unprecedented in terms of making simultaneous physical and emotional demands upon a performer. The actor was chosen for the physically demanding role because he was willing to commit to this unique project whole-heartedly giving a critically-acclaimed performance.

Other prominent roles for Caviezel include appearing with Robin Williams and Mira Sorvino in Omar Naim's "Final Cut" and with Claire Forlani and Jeremy Northam in Rowdy Herrington's "Bobby Jones: Stroke of Genius." Recently he starred in the heart-warming bio-pic "Madison" about hydroplane boat racer, Jim McCormick, and alongside Denzel Washington in the time-travelling thriller "Déjà Vu." The Tony Scott-directed film was the first be shot in New Orleans after hurricane Katrina devastated the area.

Caviezel will next be seen starring on the big screen in the science fiction/fantasy "Outlander" and the thriller "Long Weekend." He is currently in production on AMC's long-awaited re-imagining of the classic science fiction series, "The Prisoner," opposite Sir Ian McKellan.

MOZHAN MARNÒ (Soraya)

A fierce combination of talent, intelligence and beauty, Los Angeles native Mozhan Marnò is well on her way to an impressive career in acting Marnò was last seen in the Overture Films spy thriller

“Traitor” alongside Don Cheadle and Guy Pearce. Other feature film credits include “Charlie Wilson’s War” with Tom Hanks and the independent feature “August” starring Josh Harnett.

On the small screen she’s made guest appearances on popular television shows such as “Medium,” “Shark,” “K-Ville” and “The Unit.”

Marnò received rave reviews for the one-woman production of “Nine Parts of Desire” where she portrayed nine different Middle Eastern women in a 90-minute one-act play which ran at the Berkeley Repertory Theatre and at the Geffen Playhouse.

She attended boarding school at the prestigious Phillips Andover Academy in Massachusetts. Soon after, she earned a BA in Comparative Literature from Columbia University and she obtained an MFA at the distinguished Yale School of Drama. Additionally Marnò received training at the Guthrie Experience in Minnesota and at New York’s Shakespeare Lab. Fluent in German, French and Farsi, Marnò is well traveled and has lived in France, Germany, Sweden and Argentina. She currently resides in Los Angeles.

NAVID NEGAHBAN (Ali)

Navid Negahban has been building a strong career playing a broad range of intriguing characters in television and film for the past six years. The Iranian born actor spent eight years honing his theatrical skills in Germany prior to arriving in the U.S.

Other upcoming roles include Jim Sheridan’s “Brothers” with Tobey Maguire, and “Powder Blue” with Jessica Biel and Forest Whitaker. Past film credits include “Charlie Wilson’s War,” opposite Tom Hanks, and “Broken” with Heather Graham and Jeremy Sisto.

Navid’s many guest-starring roles on TV include “Law & Order,” “Shark,” “Law & Order SVU,” “NCIS,” “The Closer,” “Without a Trace,” “Lost,” “The West Wing,” “The Shield,” “24,” “Las Vegas” and “The Unit.”

DAVID DIAAN (Ebrahim)

Los Angeles based David Diaan (aka Fariborz), is a popular Iranian American actor, radio and TV host, writer and filmmaker. He moved to the United States in 1976 to finish high school and later study journalism at the University of Missouri. His theater group has toured across the United States and Canada. David is a prolific artist and humanitarian.

ALI POURTASH (Mullah)

Ali Pourtash, a versatile Iranian Actor, has appeared in numerous Persian and American productions for film, stage and television, including “Benedictus,” “Mossadegh,” “Oklahoma!,” “See How They Run,” “Ninotchka,” “Beverly Hills 90210,” “The New Age,” “Veiled Threat,” “Protocol” and

“The Brady Bunch Movie.” Pourtash hosts an Iranian comedy satellite TV program in Los Angeles, appearing in the title role of “Naneh Salimeh,” an 86-year old Muslim woman.

Pourtash is the recipient of a Masters Degree in Education from National University, and a second in Film from Northridge University.

PARVIZ SAYYAD (Hashem)

Parviz Sayyad was in Germany working on a co-production film project when the Iranian Revolution took place. Soon after, his privately owned theater, The Tehran Little Theater, home to many avant-garde and experimental play productions was closed when the new political regime came in. He has never returned to Iran since then.

In 1983, he made “The Mission,” his American film debut, almost empty-handedly on a shoe-string budget. The film was about an Islamic assassin sent to New York to eliminate a former colonel in the Shah’s secret police. “The Mission” was called “the first Ghandian thriller” by the New York Magazine critic, David Denby, after its premier at the Lincoln Center New Films/New Directors Series in the Spring of 1983. In addition to the Grand Jury Award from the Locarno Film Festival, “The Mission” was enthusiastically received both by movie-goers and film critics alike.

The income and fees generated from “The Mission’s” European broadcast paved the way for Sayyad’s second feature film in America, “Checkpoint” made in 1987. This film dealt with the tensions and complexities of Iranian American relations during the hostage crisis. While making this film, Sayyad told a correspondent from the Inquirer, “Milos Forman may not be as obligated to his culture as I am. I am obsessed. I want to open the windows and show the world what has happened to us in Iran.” But the window that was opened to “The Mission” in the film centers and on television networks was entirely closed to “Checkpoint.” It was labeled “too political” and that meant the end of an exiled filmmaker’s career.

This bitter experience was the motivation for his book titled “Obstacles of Exiled Cinema” which was published in Farsi in 1995.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

CYRUS NOWRASTEH (Director, Co-Writer)

Cyrus Nowrasteh was born in Boulder, Colorado of Iranian parents, and lived in Iran as a young boy. A graduate of the USC cinema program, he has worked in the motion picture and television business for over 20 years.

He has worked as a writer on a number of TV series, most notably developing and writing the pilot for the hit USA network show, “La Femme Nikita” which ran for five years (1996-2001) and was the most successful series on USA up to that time.

In the following years, Cyrus focused on docudrama and history. In 2001 he wrote and directed the highly acclaimed Paramount/Showtime feature presentation, “The Day Reagan Was Shot.” To this day it is Showtime’s highest-rated movie and is available on DVD. The film was executive produced by Oliver Stone and starred Richard Dreyfuss, who earned a SAG best actor nomination for his portrayal of Alexander Haig. It also received an EDDIE award, as well as the Golden Satellite Award for Best Cable Motion Picture of 2001.

The following year he reteamed with Showtime to write “10,000 Black Men Named George,” starring Andre Braugher. It brings to the screen the true story of activist A. Philip Randolph who led the famous Pullman strike of the 1930s.

For both of the above films, Cyrus received the PEN Literary Award for best teleplay, becoming the only writer in the history of the PEN awards to win two years in a row in the same category.

In 2005 Cyrus was recruited by Steven Spielberg to write an episode of the Dreamworks/TNT miniseries “Into the West,” which was nominated for 16 Emmy awards and winner of three.

He has also performed production rewrites for Paramount Pictures on such notable movies as “The Hunted” (2003, starring Tommy Lee Jones), “Beyond Borders” (2003, starring Angelina Jolie) and “Shooter” (2007, starring Mark Wahlberg).

Cyrus became a national figure as the writer and producer of the acclaimed and controversial ABC docudrama, “The Path to 9/11,” which aired on September 10th and 11th, 2006, to an audience of 28 million viewers. The DVD release of that film has been suppressed to this day.

BETSY GIFFEN NOWRASTEH (Co-Writer)

Betsy Giffen Nowrasteh was born in Cleveland, Ohio, and grew up in Shaker Heights. She received her B.A. in Creative Writing from Miami University of Ohio and moved to Los Angeles when she was 22 where she worked as a production artist and copywriter in film advertising.

Her career in movie advertising included work on such movies as “The Road Warrior,” “The Postman Always Rings Twice,” “Prizzi’s Honor,” and many more.

In 1981 she married Cyrus Nowrasteh. Their two sons, Alex and Mark, were born in 1983 and 1985 respectively and while focused on motherhood Betsy started to write screenplays. Her first produced screenplay was for Largo Entertainment and HBO, entitled "Under Pressure," a dark suburban drama about a mother protecting her children. It starred Charlie Sheen and Mare Winningham and aired on HBO in 1997. She continued to write screenplays, but forayed into production design on "Norma Jean, Jack and Me," an independent film that played the festival circuit and on HDTV in 1999-2000.

DEBORAH AQUILA (Co-Producer, Casting Director)

After graduating from NYU's Tisch School of the Arts, and the Stella Adler Conservatory, Deborah Aquila began her casting career as an associate to Bonnie Timmermann. Together they worked on the first two seasons of "Miami Vice" and several feature films including Michael Mann's "Manhunter." Her independent casting career began with Steven Soderbergh's "sex, lies and videotape," and Uli Edel's "The Last Exit To Brooklyn." Before moving to Los Angeles in 1993 to cast Frank Darabont's "The Shawshank Redemption," Deborah had completed over 40 independent films in New York, most notably, Alison Maclean's "Crush," Steven Soderbergh's "King of the Hill," Michael Tolkin's "The Rapture" and "The New Age," Steven Tolkin's "Daybreak," Joseph Vasquez's "Hangin' With the Homeboys," HBO/GRANADA'S "Hostages," Steven Gyllenhaal's "Waterland" and Tony Drazan's "Zebra Head."

In 1993 she was named Senior Vice-President of Features Casting for Paramount Pictures. In addition to her responsibilities as head of the feature casting department, Deborah supervised films in production, and "on-line" cast over 19 films during her 7 year tenure at the studio. The more notable films Deborah cast at Paramount were: "Primal Fear," "Mission: Impossible II," "Double Jeopardy," "Virtuosity," "200 Cigarettes," "Varsity Blues," "The Brady Bunch Movie," "Kiss the Girls," "Mother" and "What Women Want."

After departing Paramount Pictures in 1999, Deborah returned to the independent casting world with Sam Raimi's "The Gift." Her most recent film credits include "Eagle Eye," starring Shia LaBeouf, directed by D.J. Caruso, "The Express," directed by Gary Fleder, "The Time Traveller's Wife," directed by Robert Schwenke, "Traitor," directed by Jeffrey Nachmanoff, and in television, the critically acclaimed F/X original series, "The Shield" starring Michael Chiklis and the Showtime Pilot, "Dexter."

Deborah has been recognized eight times by the Casting Society of America for her work on "Dexter," "Dead Girl," "sex, lies and videotape," "The Brady Bunch Movie," "Primal Fear," "The Shawshank Redemption," "What Women Want" and "House of Sand and Fog." In 2003, she was recognized by the Hollywood community with the Hollywood Film Festival Career Achievement Award.

Deborah has two beautiful daughters, Jessica and Katrina, who are the joy of her life.

JOEL RANSOM (Director of Photography)

Joel Ransom, has shot such projects as "The Seeker: The Dark is Rising," episodes of "Band of Brothers," "Path to 9/11," the pilot for "Battlestar Gallactica," as well as its prequel, "Caprica." He currently lives in Vancouver, BC.

STEPHEN McEVEETY (CEO, Mpower Pictures; Producer)

Mpower Pictures is led by Steve McEveety, a 30-year veteran of the film industry, former executive at ICON with Mel Gibson, and producer of some of the most memorable films of all time. Films for which McEveety has received credit have garnered 13 Academy Award® nominations and five wins. His films have been nominated for over 90 other industry-related awards.

Prior to launching Mpower Pictures, McEveety completed an exclusive producing deal with Icon Productions where he executive produced "What Women Want," "Payback," "Leo Tolstoy's Anna Karenina," "Immortal Beloved," "The Man Without a Face" and "Braveheart," which garnered ten Academy Award® nominations and won five, including Best Picture and Best Director.

He has also served as a producer on "Airborne" (which he also wrote), "Paparazzi," "187," and "We Were Soldiers."

In 2004, McEveety produced one of the most profitable films of all time, "The Passion of the Christ."

In his early career, McEveety worked as an assistant director on "Real Genius" and "An Early Frost." He then served as Unit Production Manager on films such as "The Trip to Bountiful," "Flatliners" and "Forever Young," and was associate producer of the film "Hotshots."

McEveety literally grew up in the entertainment industry. As a boy, he appeared in episodes of the golden age TV series "Gunsmoke," "My Three Sons," and "Star Trek," and was influenced by his father's success as a writer, director, and producer of successful family entertainment films.

McEveety resides in Los Angeles with his wife and four children.

JOHN SHEPHERD (President, Mpower Pictures; Producer)

John Shepherd has extensive experience in independent filmmaking as a producer and a studio executive. He recently formed Mpower Pictures with Steve McEveety and is managing development and production for the company slate.

Before Mpower Pictures, Shepherd produced the films "The Ultimate Gift" and "Bobby Jones: Stroke of Genius."

Shepherd has also served as an executive at the DreamWorks/Imagine start up POP.com working in new media. He began his producing career with World Wide Pictures writing and producing 18 films, including "The Climb," "Road to Redemption," "Something to Sing About," "A Vow to Cherish" and "The Ride."

Shepherd has been a showrunner on a number of internet based series and was VP of production

for the Atlanta based LIFE Productions. As an actor he appeared in over 50 film and television productions including “The Hunt For Red October.” He attended Northwestern University in the Radio, Television and Film Department and is a graduate of the University of California at Los Angeles.

Shepherd resides in Los Angeles with his wife and three daughters.

MPOWER PICTURES

Mpower seeks to create films that have profound cultural impact and high entertainment value. The company seeks to “empower” both the artist and the audience by telling stories that are compelling, bold and uncompromising.

Mpower Pictures was created to leverage producer Stephen McEveety’s experience in producing highly profitable event films, as well as his ability to reach and mobilize audiences across the country. His producer credits include “The Passion Of The Christ,” “We Were Soldiers,” “Braveheart” and “What Women Want.”

Mpower Pictures recently launched with its first film, “Bella” (produced in association with Metanoia Films), followed by “An American Carol.” THE STONING OF SORAYA M. is slated for release in 2009 and Mpower is currently wrapping production on the family film “Snowmen.” Visit www.mpowerpictures.com.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

FREIDOUNE SAHEBJAM

An international reporter, world historian and diplomat, Freidoune Sahebjam led an extraordinary life bringing stories to the world. He met with Che Guevara in Africa, conversed with General De Gaulle in Iran, interviewed John F. Kennedy in Hyannis Harbor, spent time with Salvador Allende in Chile and with Nelson Mandela in Pretoria, met with Pope John Paul II and the Dalai Lama, and was personally known to every Muslim sovereign across the globe. He accompanied Arthur Rubinstein to Persepolis and Audrey Hepburn to East Africa and consorted with numerous U.S. Presidents.

He also made his mark in investigative reporting in Iran. Sahebjam was the first to report on the crimes of the Islamic Republic against the Baha’ii community, as well as on the use of underage children in the Iranian Army during the 8-year Iran-Iraq War.

For his controversial reportage, he was sentenced to a death fatwa in absentia by the new Iranian Revolutionary Court. Despite this, he returned to the country incognito to investigate sensitive issues regarding the Tehran Islamic Regime, which is when he was exposed to the story of Soraya’s stoning. More recently, he covered the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan for the French daily *Le Telegraph*.

An aristocrat of Qajar heritage, he was also the author of several novels in French, including La Femme Lapidée, Le Dernier Eunuque and Le Vieux de la Montagne, as well as a recently published biography on his mother entitled Une Princesse Persane.

Since its publication in 1994, The Stoning of Soraya M. has become one of the landmarks of Sahebjam's storied career, published in countless countries and translated into a dozen languages, as well as used as a teaching tool in classrooms throughout the world.

Sahebjam passed away at his home in Neuilly-sur-Seine in March of 2008 at the age of 75.

Roadside Attractions presents
in association with Mpower Distribution

A film by Cyrus Nowrasteh
Based on a true story

“THE STONING OF SORAYA M.”

Shohreh Aghdashloo

Mozhan Marnò

Navid Negahban

David Diann

Ali Pourtash

Vida Ghahremani

Vachik Mangassarian

with
Parviz Sayyad
and
Jim Caviezel

Casting by Deborah Aquila, csa Tricia Wood, csa Jennifer Smith, csa

Makeup Effects Designed by Christien Tinsley

Costumes by Jane Anderson

Music by John Debney

Edited by Geoffrey Rowland, ace David Handman, ace

Production Designer Judy Rhee

Director of Photography Joel Ransom

Co-Executive Producers David Siegel Tina Siegel Ken Ferguson

Executive Producers Diane Hendricks Thomas J. Papa Rider Bas

Produced by Stephen McEveety John Shepherd

Based on the book by Freidoune Sahebjam

Screenplay by Betsy Giffen Nowrasteh & Cyrus Nowrasteh

Directed by Cyrus Nowrasteh

Unit Production Manager STEPHEN A. MARINACCIO II

First Assistant Director MATTHEW JAMES CLARK
Second Assistant Director TREVOR PUCKLE

Associate Producer JASON JONES

Special Appearance by
BITA SHEIBANI as LEILA

In Order of Appearance

Zahra SHOHREH AGHDASHLOO
Freidoune Sahebjam JIM CAVIEZEL
Hashem PARVIZ SAYYAD
Ebrahim DAVID DIAAN
Mullah ALI POURTASH
Kataneh NOOR AL TAHER
Malaka HAYA AL TAHER
Warden KHALID KHAN
Soraya MOZHAN MARNÒ
Mrs Massoud VIDA GHAREMANI
Second Woman SHEEDE DANA
Bita FARZANEH YAZDANI
Mrs. Hashem SALTI HASAN
Mehri LAILA QUTUB
Reza MIZYED AZRAI
Kamran TALAL NABIL MORCOS
Mohsen ABDULLAH SHAHEEN
Morteza Ramazani VACHIK MANGASSARIAN
Mourning Women SHUKREYEH THIJEEL
FADELA RASHEM
SABIHA FALEH
Ali's Friends ZORO SHASWAR
JALAL ZADHALEY
ARAS RAFI
Ringmaster YOUSEF SHWIEYHAT
Circus Boys RAMI HAMATI
FADI HAMATI
Monkey Man ASA'AD ARADA
Circus Drummer ZEID AL-YASOUFY
Servant Girl NIAYESH FEKNI
YASHA KATE
Revolutionary Guard PRASANNA PUWANARAJAH
Mohammed YAHYA HUSSEIN

Stunt Coordinator IAN EYRE

Operator "A" Camera / Steadicam PETER WILKIE
First Assistant "A" Camera SEAN ELLIOTT
Second Assistant "A" Camera SASHA PROCTOR
First Assistant "B" Camera BERNIE SMITH
Second Assistant "B" Camera NED MARTIN
Still Photographer ALI SAADI

Data Capture Engineer WAYNE TIDWELL

Data Capture Assistant HARRY S. BOILEAU
Data Manager OTTO BURNHAM

Sound Mixer DENNIS L. BAXTER
Boom Operator BAHA OTHMAN
Cable Person AMER DWAIK

Script Supervisor HEATHER ASKEW

Art Director BRADLEY SCHMIDT
Art Department Coordinator / Graphic Designer MONA SULTAN
Art Department Intern WIDAD SHAFAGOJ

Set Decorator RANA ABOUT
Leadman AMIN CHARIF
On Set Dresser RIMA NAJDI
Set Dressers IMAD MOHTASEB
FARES ZYOOD

Property Master NASSER ZOUBI
Assistant Prop Master KARIM KHEIR
Assistant Props SANA JABER
Prop Maker ANEES MAANI

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Best Boy Electric BACHIR MOUAWAEL
GEORGE SHIBA
Key Grip RONY SOKHEN
Grip & Lighting Crew MURAD ABDALLAH
MICHAEL ABIS
HAMADAH BAKA
HUSSNI BAKA
FIRASA DAHOUS
ISAM NOURI

Make Up & Hair Department Head TINA SWEIS
Hair Stylist FADI HNITI
Make Up Artist RABEE QOUL

Costume Supervisor SIERRA BAY ROBINSON
Key Textile Artist PHAEDRA DAHDALEH
Seamstress FYKRIAH ABU KHAIT
Costume Assistants KATHRYN BUCHER
KARMA HAJAWI
ABD-ALFATAJ RAYYAN

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Production Coordinator JENNIFER HAIRE
Assistant Production Coordinator ISSA SAWAQED
Production Secretary MAJD HIJJAWI

Assistant to Mrs. Aghdashloo AMNA AL HAWJA
Assistant to Mr. Caviezel ZIAD FARAJ
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Assistant to Mr. Shepherd JOANNA REPSOLD
Assistant to Mr. Marinaccio STEVEN E. SIMON
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Set Production Assistants HIND CEILIA DABBAGH
IBRAHIM KHURMA
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Picture Car Coordinator NAEL HAMDAN
FADI OMEISH
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Drivers TAHA AL-RADAIDEH
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OMAR DEEB
HANI HALAYKA
YOUSEF MANSOUR
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Special Effects Makeup Artist MIKE MEKASH
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Production Coordinator DIANE WOODHOUSE
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ALLISON OLIVER
Wig Maker ERWIN KUPITZ
Hair Technicians MARK BOLEY
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Visual Effects Supervisor ALLAN MAGLED
Visual Effects Producer MICHAEL KOWALSKI

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Lighting / Texture Artists JORGE RAZON
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Digital Post Producer JEREMY PACK
Data Managers LINDSAY FOX
STEPHEN CECI

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DI Colorist MICHAEL MINTZ
DI Conform Artist BRIAN BEARD
Scan / Record Manager GILBERT DE LA GARZA
Digital Imaging Supervisor CHRISTOPHER DUSENDSCHON
Digital Imaging Technician JASON ADAMS
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Chief Technical Engineer KEVIN MULLICAN
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Supervising Sound Designer DAVID BARNABY
Dialogue Editor SARAH PAYAN
Sound Effects Editor EVAN J. BEIGEL
Foley Editor DURAND TRENCH
Sound Editorial Assistant JOEL CATALAN
ADR Mixer MATT HOVLAND
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Produced in Cooperation with
PRIME MERIDIAN PICTURES

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Music Score Coordinator LOLA DEBNEY
Score Production Supervisor MELANIE MULLENS-HOYSEN
Sore Engineer JIMMY HOYSEN

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All songs Released by Caltex Records and Published CTX Publishing BMI

"BANDARI" and "GHOCHANI"
Written and Performed by Goudarzi
Courtesy of Caltex Records/CTXPublishing

"MOBARAK BAAD"
Written and Performed by Hamedanian
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Titles by IDENTITY STUDIOS, INC

Website Design FIVESTONE

Promotional Trailer House GORILLA PICTURES
Promotional Music TIM HOSMAN

Clearances provided by NOW CLEAR THIS!
Music Clearances provided by EVAN M. GREENSPAN, INC.
Title Clearance provided by DENNIS ANGEL, ESQ.

Dolby Sound Consultant BRYAN PENNINGTON

Digital Film System provided by THE CAMERA HOUSE

Offline Editing Systems provided by RUNWAY

Payroll Services provided by MEDIA SERVICES PAYROLL

Insurance provided by JOHN WILLIAM HART, III INSURANCE AGENCY

Optical Soundtrack Negative provided by DJ AUDIO

Selected Laser Etched Localizations provided by T&T OPTICAL

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The Producers would like to thank the following:

DARYUSH NOWRASTEH

PASTOR BRIAN ADEL

HEYDAR ADEL

A.G.

TODD BUEHL

JEFF STENTZ

FREDERICK C. FOOTE - Two Shoes Productions

DIFFERENT DRUMMER

PAUL KAMPF

MELISSA BROCKMAN

VIC RAKSHANI

JAMES WOMER

MICHAEL YOUN

JOSEPH COHEN

ANNIE D.

PEB JACKSON

DENNIS RICE

LENA PLATH

CLARE ANNE DARAGH

KATHIE BERLIN

FREDELL POGODIN

ST. PHILOMENA