



The Iran Job

A film by Till Schauder

"Sad and hopeful in equal measure, and exceptional in its storytelling."

—Betsy Sharkey, *Los Angeles Times*

"A complicated, accessible and heartfelt human drama, one that Obama, Romney and Americans of all political stripes should see."

-Andrew Ohehir, *Salon.com*



United States, Iran and Germany / 2012 / Documentary / English and Persian with English subtitles / 93 min. / 2.35:1 / Dolby Digital

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SYNOPSIS

When American basketball player Kevin Sheppard accepts a job to play in one of the world's most feared countries – Iran - he expects the worst. But what he finds is a country brimming with generosity, acceptance, and sensuality. With a charismatic personality that charms everyone he meets, Kevin forms an unlikely friendship with three outspoken Iranian women who share with him their strong opinions on everything, from politics to religion to gender roles. Kevin's season in Iran eventually culminates in something much bigger than basketball: the uprising and subsequent suppression of Iran's reformist Green Movement - a powerful prelude to the sweeping changes currently unfolding across the Middle East in the wake of the Arab Spring.

FESTIVALS AND AWARDS

OFFICIAL SELECTION:

Los Angeles Film Festival
Spokane International Film Festival
San Diego Asian Film Festival
Bahamas International Film Festival
Houston's Iranian Film Festival
Starz Denver Film Festival

HOW "THE IRAN JOB" STARTED:

In the fall of 2008 – shortly after Iran's president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad called for the destruction of Israel – husband-&-wife-filmmakers **Till Schauder & Sara Nodjoui** had a Skype call with **Kevin Sheppard**, a flashy point-guard from the U.S. Virgin Islands. Kevin was about to start a basketball contract in the **Iranian Super League**. A minute into the conversation he had Till and Sara rolling on the floor laughing in spite of the prospect of playing in a country that's supposedly full of illegal nukes and Islamic terrorists. They decided to start filming.

Till (husband/director) filmed Kevin in Iran over several visits, until on his last trip – in the run-up to Iran's 2009 election – he was informed that he had been placed on a "black list" (for reasons still not clear), and was put in detention in a kind of "hotel-prison" inside the glitzy new Tehran airport. Sara (wife/producer) was at home, 5-months pregnant, while Till was in Tehran hand-shredding some not-so-cool-documents-when-you're-stuck-in-Iran and flushing them down the toilet. He was sent back to New York on the next plane — a stroke of luck in retrospect given the number of filmmakers and journalists recently arrested in Iran.

INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR

Till Schauder, director of "The Iran Job" in Indiewire

By Indiewire—June 12, 2012

Director Till Schauder grew up in Gottengen, a small town in Germany with plenty of local art house theatres. At the ripe age of 16, he saw "Harold and Maude" and was forever indebted to the art of filmmaking. While in film school, he directed two award-winning films (City Bomber, Strong Shit) that earned him a government grant allowing him to spend a full year in NYC on full scholarship. In New York, Schauder met his wife Sara, who is the mother of his two kids, and also the producer of his new film, "The Iron Job", which is screening in the documentary competition at this year's LAFF.

Director Schauder says: *I wanted to make a documentary that plays like a movie. No "experts," no talking heads, no political statements. Instead I wanted action, humor and romance. I did want a film that touches on the issues around Iran (political, religious, etc), but purely through the characters and the real-life drama in front of me, as opposed to high-brow intellectualism. For this approach I needed an exceptional protagonist – someone whose personality would create conflict, allow humor and attract other exceptional characters. It was important that "Iran"– which conjures up all kinds of associations - was the backdrop to the film, not the main character. And I needed a platform that's not about politics or religion. Sports seemed the perfect medium.*

On the challenges:

1) Fundraising: As a first-time doc filmmaker I had zero credit with the gatekeepers. Though many networks expressed interest in the pitch, they all wanted to see footage – a catch-22 in doc filmmaking. We learned who the gatekeepers are in the grant world – and got rejected by all of them. Finally NYSCA bit; then the Paley Center selected us for a pitch competition, which we won. With more footage we were able to get more support – though still none from traditional grant sources. Luckily we made it to a rough cut, which Sara placed into the hands of Abigail Disney. She saw merit in the film and became our executive producer. We wouldn't be here without her. We also ran a Kickstarter campaign, raising 100K.

2) Logistics in Iran: Journalist visas were denied so we had to shoot under the radar. We decided it was safer for me to go on my own, entering as a German tourist. I packed an HDV camera – small enough for an unassuming backpack. If I got into trouble I could say I'm just a tourist filming the sites. I used that line a few times until (before the presidential election) I was detained. Shooting like this was challenging. I didn't have the best equipment, nor a crew. But it was a blessing in disguise, and crucial for building trust and intimacy with the film's subjects.

What would you like the LAFF audiences to come away with after seeing your film?

People are people, anywhere in the world. If we can focus on that we'll get past our differences. It's important to make a distinction between the people of Iran and the government. Iran is not a monolithic society by any stretch of the imagination. There are plenty of different opinions out there, political, religious, and otherwise - much like in the U.S. - and so one should take with a grain of salt what certain extreme leaders may say - on both sides. Most importantly, this film focuses on Iran's people, rather than its government. I hope it can challenge perceptions and remind us of what's at stake when we muse about going to war with people we often know too little about.

On the film's inspirations:

"Harold and Maude"... An American basketball player in Iran seems just as unlikely as a romance between a 20-year-old and an 80-year-old...

Future Projects:

It took four years to complete my first doc. Even so, and as weird as it may seem, I'm going for seconds! There are two docs I'm mulling over – including one about another unlikely bridge-building athlete. Also a feature film in the pipeline.

CREW BIOGRAPHIES

Till Schauder – Director



Till got his start in Germany where he wrote and directed the award winning films “Strong Shit” and “City Bomber”. After earning a government grant for the arts he made his U.S. debut with the romantic comedy “Santa Smokes”, which won several international awards, among them Best Director at the Tokyo International Film Festival and the Studio Hamburg Newcomer Award. “Duke’s House”, about Duke Ellington’s Harlem home, premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival. Through his company Partner Pictures, Till writes, directs, shoots and produces for television and film. He has a side career in acting where he is occasionally cast in shows like HBO’s Mildred Pierce or commercials like a 2008 national American Express campaign. Till is a graduate of the University of Television and

Film, Munich. He teaches film classes at NYU and has been a guest lecturer at several other campuses, and a panelist at various film festivals.

Selected Filmography

1997- *Strong Shit*

2002- *Santa Smokes*

2007- *Galileo Misteries* (TV Series)

2012- *The Iran Job*

Sara Nodjoumi - Producer



Sara is a film programmer and producer. She co-produced and co-directed a series of documentaries about the Iranian community in America. *I CALL MYSELF PERSIAN: IRANIANS IN AMERICA*, the first of these films, aired on multiple PBS stations and premiered in New York at the MoMA Documentary Fortnight. From 2002 to 2005, Sara joined director Till Schauder as an Associate Producer on his feature films *SANTA SMOKES* and *DUKE'S HOUSE*. In 2006, she worked on the marketing and release of Charles Sturridge's critically acclaimed *LASSIE*. From 2004-2009, Sara worked at the Tribeca Film Festival as an Associate Programmer. In 2009, Sara launched and programmed the first children's film series at Tribeca Cinemas (Rated

#1 movie series in NYC for kids by NY Magazine). She is frequently invited to serve on and moderate film festival juries and industry panels, e.g. at the Tribeca Film Festival, Bahamas Intl. Film Festival, New York Women in Film and Television. Sara and Till reside in Brooklyn with their children, Nika and Luca.

Abigail Disney – Executive Producer



Abigail Disney (Executive Producer) is a filmmaker and philanthropist. Her longtime passion for women's issues and peace building culminated in her first film, the acclaimed *PRAY THE DEVIL BACK TO HELL*, about the Liberian women who peacefully ended their country's fourteen-year civil war. She is currently Executive Producer of the groundbreaking PBS mini-series *WOMEN, WAR & PEACE*, the most comprehensive global media initiative ever mounted on the role of women in peace and conflict. Along with her husband, Pierre Hauser, Abigail co-founded the Daphne Foundation, which works with low-income communities in the five boroughs of New York City. Her work in philanthropy, women's engagement and

leadership, and conflict resolution has been recognized through the Epic Award from the White House Project, the Changing the Landscape for Women Award from the Center for the Advancement of Women, and the prestigious International Advocate for Peace (IAP) Award from the Cardozo Law School's Cardozo Journal of Conflict Resolution. In addition, Abigail holds degrees from Yale, Stanford, and Columbia. She lives in New York City with her husband and four children.

CAST BIOGRAPHIES

Kevin Sheppard



Kevin (born 1979 - the year of Iran's Islamic Revolution) is a multi-talented United States Virgin Islands athlete.

Kevin played basketball and soccer at Jacksonville University, on scholarship. As a teenager he was pursued by the global soccer powerhouse Manchester United to join their youth development program in the English Premiere League.

Kevin, who was also pursued by various college basketball coaches in the United States, chose hoops over professional soccer because "all the girls were into basketball players."

After a successful college career in the Atlantic Sun Conference at Jacksonville University (where he led his team in assists and minutes played each year, and was a two-time all-conference player) Kevin started his professional career overseas, playing in South America, Europe, China and Israel before joining the Iranian Super League in 2008.

He stayed in Iran through the 2011 season and became one of the most successful and most popular players ever to play in the Super League.

In 2011 Kevin and his wife Leah had a baby girl. Since becoming a dad Kevin has taken time off from professional basketball to run a non-for-profit youth league, CBA – Choices Basketball Associations Inc, of which he is founder and president. CBA's goal is to break the cycle of violence in Kevin's native U.S. Virgin Islands by providing a positive environment for kids through after-school programs and basketball.

To learn more about and support Kevin's non-for-profit youth league please visit <http://choicesbasketballvi-org.webs.com/>

Kevin traces his dedication for positive change back to his time in Iran. The experiences he had there, and the strong personal relationships he formed, have made him a different man. In particular, he credits three Iranian women, all fans of his former Iranian club A.S. Shiraz, for introducing him to their rich culture and to Iran's pressing social issues, which in Kevin's view mirror some of the same issues still plaguing the U.S. and the Western world at large: women's rights, human rights, inequality. These three women allowed him to grow as a global citizen by providing their unique perspectives and by acting as 'citizen diplomats.'

Elaheh



Elaheh is a die-hard basketball fan and supporter of A.S. Shiraz. She is also a fantastic host who effortlessly displays Iranian kindness and hospitality, traits she constantly improves through her work as a professional event planner. During Kevin's time in Iran, she took the lead in showing him around her beautiful city of Shiraz.

Laleh



Laleh shares Kevin's passion for basketball. Like her friends she has a professional career (in administration) and she joins them in representing the highly educated female Iranian workforce (more than 50% of university graduates in Iran are female). She is currently getting a masters degree in Internet Technology.

Hilda



Hilda met Kevin through her work as a professional sports-physiotherapist. She is a devoted basketball fan and supporter of A.S. Shiraz. Her friendship with Kevin gave her a chance to exchange worldviews, practice English and most of all get Kevin in shape for the next ball game. Hilda is currently studying for a second degree in English.

CREDITS

CREW

Director	Till Schauder
Producers	Till Schauder Sara Nodjoumi
Executive Producer	Abigail Disney
Cinematography	Till Schauder
Film Editing	David Teague
Co-Editor	Till Schauder
Original Music	Kareem Roustom
Rap & Hip-Hop	Shahin Najafi, Jadugaran, ZedBazi
Animation & Graphics	Wes Townsend/Garbanzo Grafix

FEATURING

Kevin Sheppard
Leah Sheppard
Hilda
Laleh and her generous family
Elaheh and her generous family
Abdullah and his generous family
The entire A.S. Shiraz basketball club
Zoran "Z" Milicic, Center
Kami Jamshidvand, Forward
Ali Doraghi, Center
Mehdi Shirjang, Forward
Gholamreza Khajeh, Team Owner
Asadollah Kabir, Coach
Fereidoon Reisi, Manager
Mohammad Ahmadi, Analysis Coach
Ehsan, Driver