

‘Be the person you are portraying,’ says inspiring young Iranian actor Sadaf Asgari

- Winner of the Special Jury Award for Acting at the Sundance Film Festival, Sadaf says her role in the film ‘Until Tomorrow,’ screened before Ajyal Jurors, is very special to her

Doha, Qatar; October 8, 2022: Not many years ago, a young Iranian girl would act in front of mirrors and talk to herself as characters she imagined herself to be. She was in love with cinema and wanted to be an actor, but the social circumstances meant she had to take the conventional road – find a job to support her family. And then something magical happened.

Her uncle, a filmmaker, auditioned her for his film, and the rest, as they say, is history. That young girl, Sadaf Asgari is today one of the most influential young faces in Iranian cinema, having already won a Special Jury Award for Acting at the prestigious Sundance Film Festival for her role in **Exam** (2019).

Addressing youth jurors at the Ajyal Spotlight section of the Special 10th Edition of the Ajyal Film Festival, Sadaf said building an acting career is not easy. “There are hundreds of people out there, who attend acting classes, and have immense talent. But what matters is your passion for acting. If you are passionate, you will follow it, and it will get you going.”

Thankful to her uncle Ali Asgari, who cast her in a break-out role, Sadaf said: “No doubt, my uncle supported me, but it is your real passion for cinema that will define your career. Acting classes help you in understanding the techniques, but, to be honest, acting comes from deep down. You have to be in touch with your emotions and feelings and be the person you are portraying.”

Sadaf plays the lead role in **Until Tomorrow** (Iran, France, Qatar/2022) directed by Ali Asgari, in which she portrays a young mother, trying to hide from her parents her two-month-old baby. A compelling portrait of the millennial generation vis-à-vis traditions, Sadaf captures the vulnerabilities of her character impeccably. She said the film is closest to her heart now.

“I really like all my films and even when a film doesn’t turn out to be what we expected, the experience we gain is invaluable. With every experience, I was learning more and more,” said Sadaf, who likes short form content more so because it fits with her approach to acting.

“When I did my first film **Disappearance**, a DFI-granted film that premiered at Venice International Film Festival), I didn’t really get into reading the script. Even today, typically, I don’t spend too much time reading scripts because the more you read, the more your approach to the character becomes ‘technical’. I like to go before the camera with raw emotions, by deeply getting involved into why the character behaves and responds in a particular way. I like to get under the skin of the character and their environment.”

Sadaf has also starred in ***Yalda, a Night for Forgiveness*** by Massoud Bakhshi, which was winner of the Grand Jury Prize at Sundance Film Festival in 2019 and marked its MENA Premiere at Ajyal Film Festival 2020.

Sadaf said she was overjoyed and excited after winning the award at Sundance in the beginning, but “unfortunately in Iran, these recognitions do not have the same kind of impact as in other countries. Of course, I got congratulatory messages and was offered jobs and positions, but, for me, the real impact is when I know the films touch people. At several screenings, women come to me and say they have gone through similar experiences as the characters I did. I feel honoured I can do work that move people.”

In recognition of her outstanding work and for being the inspiration for young people by being the change they want to see in the world, Sadaf Asgari was presented a special ‘Ajyal Honorary Award’ by the youth Ajyal Jurors.

The Ajyal Film Festival screened a specially curated programme of important stories from around the world to 613 youth jurors from over 50 countries. They also took part in the Ajyal Talks and Spotlight sessions in addition to several lively discussions on cinema.

Katara is the Cultural Partner of the Special 10th Edition of the Ajyal Film Festival. Contributing Partners include Darwish Holding, the Official Electronics Provider; with FNAC, Sony and 51 East; Qommunication is the Social Media Partner; and Friends of the Festival include Alkalive, the Official Water Sponsor; Giffoni, Qatar Museums, Leisure (Virtuocity).

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