

PRESS BOOKLET



# A SISTERS' TALE

خواهرها

DIRECTOR  
LEILA AMINI



# A SISTERS' TALE خواهر



## SYNOPSIS

Filmmaker Leila Amini's sister Nasreen once filled their Tehran home with her beautiful voice. However, she stopped singing when pressured to marry Mohammad. Over the years, Nasreen dedicated herself to being an excellent wife and mother. Yet Mohammad primarily saw his role as working outside the home, leaving Nasreen longing for the simple joys and affections of married life.

When her youngest child was born, Nasreen became terrified that her only achievement in life would be being the mother of two children. She was determined to pursue her lifelong passion for singing, even though performing in public is forbidden for women in Iran.

Mohammad's absence and lack of support frustrated Nasreen, leading to many arguments. Her mother and sisters did their best to protect Nasreen's marriage; they were concerned about her future. Over seven years of filming Nasreen, Leila closely witnessed her sister's journey to free her voice as a singer and as a woman. From a vulnerable homemaker, she gradually transformed into a woman in control of her own destiny. Nasreen's emancipation has inspired fundamental change for her children, her sisters, their mother, and, hopefully, for their country.

# DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I have had “social anxiety” since childhood. I was a quiet and withdrawn child, but everything changed with an old video camera.

My father was in the army, and because of his job, we lived in a city where we were strangers and had no family or friends—a place surrounded by mountains and hills.

Eighty families, like us, had come there from other cities and had no relatives. Our loneliness brought us closer and turned us into one big family. One day, the wealthiest family bought a video camera and generously lent it to others. Enthused by how this device could connect me to others, I soon became the resident videographer with that camera. I was about fifteen years old, and little by little, I became such an expert in filming that whenever there was a ceremony, the neighbor's camera and I were invited together. I was the videographer of the community: weddings, funerals, family parties, the celebration of the birth of a child... A miracle had happened. Filming allowed me to enter gatherings and rituals I could not attend without a camera. Over time, more people trusted me and shared their secrets with me. I was no longer alone and was fascinated by my new friend, the camera.

As I became a young woman, I passed through those mountains and hills to the capital and studied filmmaking and screenwriting at the Art University of Tehran. I worked as an assistant director, cameraman, and editor for the following years. For my films, I continued to be the one-woman band I used to be with the neighbor's camera for years. I could be present at crucial and intimate scenes without disturbing my protagonists and continue to observe patiently.

In 2016, I started making a film about my older sister, Nasreen. Her story represents many women of my country whose traditional and religious restrictions and prohibitions of government laws have stopped them from achieving their desires and dreams. Women who pay a heavy price and are forced to make great sacrifices to get their minimum rights as a human. I was with Nasreen and her family for seven years and saw how she changed from an unhappy housewife into an active woman who knew what she wanted. She challenged her husband's religious and patriarchal thoughts and confronted a misogynist society. She tried to find her voice and recover her lost identity and freedom.

This film documents the life of one of the millions of women in Iran who are now changing their circumstances, becoming conscious about their true selves, and won't take any step back. At the same time, the story of Nasreen can be related to any person who experiences womanhood in our global society. As a middle-class woman, many of her struggles are shared between women in different places worldwide, making our story universal.

# INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR LEILA AMINI

## **You have filmed your sister for 7 years. What was the initial spark, what led to it?**

My sister Nasreen got married traditionally, gave birth to two children, and took on a housewife role. On the verge of turning forty, she was struggling with postpartum depression, had gained 47 kilos of excess weight, and was not at all happy with her married life. Looking for ways to save her midlife crisis, she felt nothing could heal her but freeing her voice. The story of my sister and the journey she embarked on was very familiar to me. As a woman, I had fought to find my identity and personal independence as a female filmmaker in a patriarchal environment full of prohibitions and limitations. I knew the hardships she would face on her path and how much she would suffer.

As a sister, I would have preferred her to forget her passion and focus on her family life. But as a woman, I gave her the right to have a dream and to fight for its realization, discover her identity away from the identity of the wife and mother she was. And as a filmmaker, I picked up my camera and started recording her life with many questions as a woman myself.

## **Did you expect from the beginning that it would be such a long process?**

As a filmmaker, my constant presence for my sister carried a clear message: “You are not alone. I believe in your chosen path, and as a woman and a sister, I will stand by you until you achieve your dream on your journey. This meant I would stay with her until the end of her journey, regardless of how long the process would take.

However, other issues also didn’t make the elapsed time ineffective. Firstly, I made this film in a single-person documentary style. Considering the challenges of producing a documentary film, it’s understandable that preparing everything requires more time and energy when one person is responsible for everything.

Also, over the years, significant historical and political events that occurred in my country have had a profound impact on prolonging the production process.

And by the way; when the character of my film is a sensitive and artistic woman with many emotional and mental complexities, she could easily ask me to leave her alone with my camera so she can take a break for a while.

## **Were there moments during this time when you wanted to give up or abandon the project—did you experience times of doubt, and if so, which ones?**

I can answer this question from two perspectives:

As a filmmaker, doubt, questioning, and curiosity have been the most crucial elements driving my work and life. Over the years, I’ve evolved alongside Nasreen, and our goals have continuously undergone transformation and reinterpretation. Doubting, asking questions, and reassessing everything have been inevitable. As a woman, whenever I looked at my sister’s children and contemplated their future and the impact of Nasreen’s decisions on their destiny, I constantly asked myself, “Am I standing on the right side? Am I doing the right thing?”.

## **Has working on this project led you to new insights, and if so, what are they?**

Working on this film has equipped me with new insights and skills, particularly those I developed as an independent artist. My abilities in storytelling, cinematography, and directing were consistently put to the test. I encountered situations and characters familiar to us all: everyday people and the unceasing flow of life. The challenge was to transform this ordinary narrative into something captivating and profound. I continually examined past paths and future directions to maintain their coherence over seven years while staying focused on my objective. This approach has provided me with a broad guideline in my personal life: how to sustain steady and incremental progress.

**Why might people in other countries be interested in this story?**

Through this film, I strive to picture the indoor space of Iranian family life with all its nuances. The struggles of Nasreen with her unloving husband is a human issue we can all understand. Her mid-life crises, her tender love for her children, and her vulnerabilities when it comes to making choices are themes many women worldwide could relate to. If I were to summarize it, people might be interested in this film because it is not only about my family and my sister but also a universal story about daring to dream as a Human and fighting for it.

**Is there something particularly precious to you in working with your sister and on the film?**

Yes, there is something particularly precious to me in both my sister and the film. When I decided to make a film about my sister's journey to achieve her dream, she was alone. I chose to accompany her, and through this journey, "she" became "we." Together, we found greater strength, our motivations strengthened, and our path smoother. Neither of us could have endured and continued without the other. We also discovered deeper meanings of being human and being a woman. We became mirrors for each other, and by seeing each other's weaknesses, shortcomings, and vulnerabilities, we gained a better understanding of ourselves.



Nasreen and her family

# PROTAGONISTS

**Nasreen** is 37 years old. She married Mohammad 15 years ago through an arranged marriage under family pressure. She has been a mother and housewife for the past decade, mostly at home with her kids. However, after the birth of her second child, Hana, she struggled with post-partum depression. Unhappily, she also felt distanced from Mohammad, who often used work as an excuse. Despite her efforts to save her marriage and her conviction to keep her family together, Nasreen felt a growing dissatisfaction.

Nasreen has loved singing since childhood. As the eldest daughter, she endured the most limitations from her parents, being unable to attend art school to study music. Many of her life choices were compromised due to her parents' restrictions. Now, Nasreen is exploring her human needs while managing her responsibilities as a mother of two. Our film traces her journey toward emancipation, from a housewife dreaming of singing on stage to a woman who no longer compromises her choices. This liberation fosters a more compassionate relationship with her kids and aligns her with a collective dream: raising awareness for women in her country.

**Mohammad**, 45, is a motorcycle technician with a deep passion for his work. He spends most of his time in his garage. Conservative and religious, he disapproves of Nasreen's singing but rarely voices his opinions, opting instead for passive-aggressive behavior and distancing himself from her. Though a responsible father, his involvement is more pronounced after the divorce. Trapped in an arranged marriage, Mohammad enjoys more freedom as a man, spending time outside the home for work or with friends.

**Hamid** is ten years old. Sensitive and affected by his parents' dynamic, he is affectionate but introverted, often keeping his feelings to himself due to worries about his parents' divorce. At home, he supports Nasreen morally and physically, helping care for Hana and maturing into a young man by the film's end.

**Hana** At the start of our story, Hana is a seven-month-old baby. By the end, she has grown and is attending primary school. As Nasreen's musical journey unfolds, Hana's interest in music grows, and she takes her first steps in learning alongside her mother. Hana, a representation of the future for Iranian women, embodies the spirit of hope.

**Leila**, 35, is Nasreen's sister and the filmmaker behind the camera. Having studied cinema, she is pursuing her passion as an artist. Unlike Nasreen, Leila did not face the same limitations as their parents, as Nasreen made sacrifices for her younger siblings' freedom. Aware of this, Leila's primary motivation for making the film is to support Nasreen's decisions. While Leila operates the camera and is not seen, her presence is felt through her voice and occasional appearances. She refrains from sharing her opinions about Nasreen's situation but supports her during critical moments, such as the night before her divorce. Sometimes, Leila considers abandoning filming to care for the children.

# CAST & CREW

## Protagonists

Nasreen Amini, Mohamad Eigharlou,  
Hamid Eigharlou, Hana Eigharlou,  
Sareh Amini, Fatemehjan Nourian

## Director and Author

Leila Amini

## Cinematography

Leila Amini

## Editing

Audrey Maurion  
Leila Amini  
Morteza Payeshenas

## Sound

Leila Amini  
Patrick Becker

## Sound Design

Ensieh Maleki

## Sound Mix

Dominik Avenwedde

## Sound Studio

nurTon GmbH

## Production

Mira Film, Docmaniacs

## Producers

Afsaneh Salari  
Vadim Jendreyko  
Leila Amini

## Co-Producer

Kaleo La Belle

## Associate Producers

Christine Le Goff  
Hercli Bundi  
Susanne Guggenberger

## Line Producer

Pascal Moor

## Production Manager

Sareh Amini  
Hamedreza Izadpanah

## Co-production

La Belle Film GmbH  
Schweizer Radio und Fernsehen SRF/SRG SSR

## Swiss Distributor

Vinca Film  
[www.vincafilm.ch](http://www.vincafilm.ch)

## Supported by

Swisslos-Fonds Basel-Stadt and  
Swisslos-Fonds Basel-Landschaft  
Zürcher Filmstiftung  
Succès Passage Antenne, SRG SSR  
Docs Up Fund

# TECHNICAL DETAILS

Format 16:9

Length 93 min

Year 2024

Original Languages Farsi  
Subtitles English

Countries of Production  
Switzerland, France, Iran

World Premiere: Semaine de la critique,  
Locarno Film Festival, 9. August 2024

## PRODUCTION COMPANIES



Mira Film was founded in 2002 by Vadim Jendreyko and Hercli Bundi. Alongside the two founders, Susanne Guggenberger has been a permanent member of the production team since 2012. With a strong commitment to form and storytelling, Mira Film produces films on social, political, and cultural issues with a strong personal touch. In the past years, we have co-produced with partners from Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, France, Chile, Georgia, China, Canada, Argentina, and the USA. Our films have premiered at festivals such as Sundance, Berlinale, IDFA, CPH:DOX, Karlovy Vary, and Visions du Réel and find their audience through theatrical release, television, VOD, and streaming platforms. We value directors who pursue authentic cinematic paths and production partners who appreciate shared creative processes.

Contact: [info@mirafilm.ch](mailto:info@mirafilm.ch)  
[www.mirafilm.ch](http://www.mirafilm.ch)

## DOC MANIACS

Docmaniacs is an alternative production house based in Paris that originated from the Docmaniacs Collective in Tehran, Iran. Co-founded in 2015 by Iranians Afsaneh Salari and Hoda Siahtiri, the collective was born from their shared vision and experiences during their master's studies in the European Docnomads program.

We are dedicated to directing and producing films and supporting like-minded artists from Iran and Afghanistan on the international film stage. Our collaborative approach is rooted in horizontal structures, ensuring equal participation and creative input. Through this collective, we amplify voices and narratives from the global south, aiming to shape a potential history.

Our films have been showcased and honored at prestigious film festivals, including IDFA, Sheffield DocFest, Visions du Réel, and CPH:DOX, among others.

Contact: [info@docmaniacs.com](mailto:info@docmaniacs.com)  
[www.docmaniacs.com](http://www.docmaniacs.com)

## CO-PRODUCTION COMPANY



LA BELLE FILM was founded in 2010 by Kaleo La Belle and Emma Marxer. Based in Zurich Switzerland, we focus on personal storytelling, socially-relevant documentaries, and essay films. We collaborate with upcoming filmmakers and established directors with strong artistic visions and unique narratives. Our films have premiered and been awarded at international festivals around the world

including Visions du Réel, Hotdocs, Locarno, Krakow, and Dok-Leipzig. LA BELLE FILM produces internationally for cinema, TV and festival markets and is a member of the Swiss and European Film Academy.

[www.labellefilm.com](http://www.labellefilm.com)



# LEILA AMINI

Director, cinematographer, author, producer



Leila Amini studied for a BA in cinema at the Art University of Tehran, Faculty of Cinema & Theater, and an MA in Dramatic Literature from the same university. She played different roles in Iranian cinema for years, mainly as assistant director and editor. Her first film *Hasookheth*, portrays a family going through the loss of their lost son through which we grasp life in a traditional Iranian family dealing with uncertainty and grief. This film was screened at film festivals in Iran and broadcast by the BBC. Leila is an alumnus of Dok incubator 2023 for *A Sisters' Tale*.

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## Filmography

2024 "A Sisters' Tale" director, cinematographer, author, producer, 93 min, Documentary

2018 "Hasookheth" director and cinematographer, 70 min, Documentary

[www.asisterstale-film.com](http://www.asisterstale-film.com)

The theatrical release in Switzerland is planned for winter 2024 / 2025  
[www.vincafilm.ch](http://www.vincafilm.ch) / [info@vincafilm.ch](mailto:info@vincafilm.ch)