

Local cinema club explores Iranian films in 5-part series

By **Shanee Frazier**
Staff Writer

The opportunity to experience a hand-picked series of foreign films, all directed by Iranian filmmakers, about Iranian culture in all its complexities is now available to local residents at South Orange Performing Arts Center as part of “La Cinematheque Film Club,” hosted by South Orange filmmaker Gerard Amsellem.

The series began Sept. 13 with “The Cow,” by director Dariush Mehrjui, a film that premiered internationally in 1969. The screening schedule for the remaining films in the series is: “The Cyclist,” 1987, directed by Mohsen Makhmalbaf on Oct. 4; “Close-Up,” 1990, by Abbas Kiarostami on Nov. 29; “The Children of Heaven,” 1997, by Majid Majidi on Dec. 13; and “The Separation,” 2011, by Asghar Farhadi on Jan. 17. All shows will be screened at 2 p.m. in the Loft at the South Orange Performing Arts Center.

The Iranian film series is the latest offering of Amsellem’s “La Cinematheque Film Club,” which specializes in presenting important works of film rarely seen in the United States to a local audience.

An artist, filmmaker and educator who resides in South Orange, Amsellem personally chooses all the films, provides extensive background information and notes on them, introduces each one, and leads a discussion following the screenings.

He is no stranger to exploring the films of other time periods and cultures: Since 2011, Amsellem has curated a film series exploring the diverse facets of culture in Spain, Germany, Russia, France and Japan, to name a few.

After each screening, Amsellem provides a question-and-answer session, in which he discusses the cinematic qualities of the film, its director and their importance, the direction the director’s films take, and the influence the director has had worldwide.

In a recent interview with the News-Record, Amsellem spoke about why he is inspired to use the medium of film to bridge the gap between local residents and and cultures with which they may have had limited exposure.

“I thought that it was a good time for people to have art connect them back to basic human values and concepts,” Amsellem said.



Photos Courtesy of Larry Dell

Filmmaker Gerard Amsellem, left, discusses the Iranian film ‘The Cow’ with political scientist Hossein Hafezian on Sept. 13 at the first in a series of Iranian film screenings.

He is also excited about the fact that he is able to have an in-depth discussion with filmgoers after each screening, which allows for additional insight to the viewing experience.

“This is not done anywhere else, and if they do, it’s at a very expensive price because you have someone speaking and not in great detail,” Amsellem said. “I give people articles and talk in depth; it’s really educational. The people in Maplewood and South Orange are very supportive of this.”

An additional piece of this particular film series is the involvement of Hossein Hafezian, a renowned expert in the subject of Iranian culture, who Amsellem enlisted to provide personal insight into each film.

“I thought it would be great to have a professor who has knowledge of the social and political climate, and I would speak about the film,” Amsellem said. “We called around the area and were connected with Dr. Hafezian who agreed to work with us for this series. For each film, he will talk about the political climate and background.”

Hafezian is indeed qualified for this role. He has written extensively on political development, democratization, Middle East politics and women’s issues in various Persian, English and Arabic journals. He has been a member of the board of directors and treasurer of the Iranian Associa-

tion of Women’s Studies since 2005.

He has also given lectures and participated in numerous international conferences held in Asia, the Middle East, Europe and the United States during the past 10 years. Hafezian served as chairman of the Department of Political Science at Islamic Azad University in Karaj, Iran, from 2006 to 2010 and is currently an adjunct assistant professor in the Department of Political Science and Law at Montclair State University, as well as at the School of Diplomacy at Seton Hall University.

The prospect of shedding some light on the undertones in each film is something Hafezian feels is critical to gaining a better understanding to the films.

“For many Americans, all that they see about Iran is what is in the mainstream media, and unfortunately all they see is nuclear negotiations and military conflict,” he said in a recent interview with the News-Record. “Before each film, I give an overview of the Iranian cultural, political and economic conditions, all of which are totally different for each (film).”

“Iran is one of the few countries in the Middle East that has an independent film industry,” he continued. “Each one of these films is a great work of art.”

“I’m excited to be able to bring the work of these talented and courageous directors to a wider audience,” Amsellem said in a recent press release. “With Dr. Hossein as our guide this series of films is going to be a unique event that not only explores the filmmakers’ artistic brilliance but a learning experience providing insights into the people, politics and culture of Iran.”

The cost to become a member of the film club and attend all remaining screenings is \$65. Tickets can be purchased at the SOPAC box office, 1 SOPAC Way in South Orange. The box office is open from noon to 6 p.m., Mondays through Saturdays. Tickets may all be purchased online at SOPACnow.org/education/filmclub. For more information, call 973-313-2787.



The film’s audience listens as Amsellem discusses ‘The Cow’ Sept. 13.

ENERGIZE YOUR LUNCH HOUR!

ADULT ICE SKATING CLASSES WITH JoJo Starbuck
TWO TIME OLYMPIAN & WORLD MEDALIST

THE CODEY ARENA

Tuesdays and Thursdays 12:15-1:15 PM
from September through June

All levels welcome!
Join anytime!

4 classes/month for \$120
8 classes/month for \$200
Walk on fee \$35 per class

Visit Skating Classes at jojostarbuck.com
Register in advance info@jojostarbuck.com
THE CODEY ARENA 560 Northfield Ave., West Orange, NJ

GREAT GIFT IDEA!

“SAY HELLO TO A GOOD BUY.”

Call me even if you hate the slogan!

CALL: 917-612-7507

GARY STEIN
garystein611@gmail.com

30652