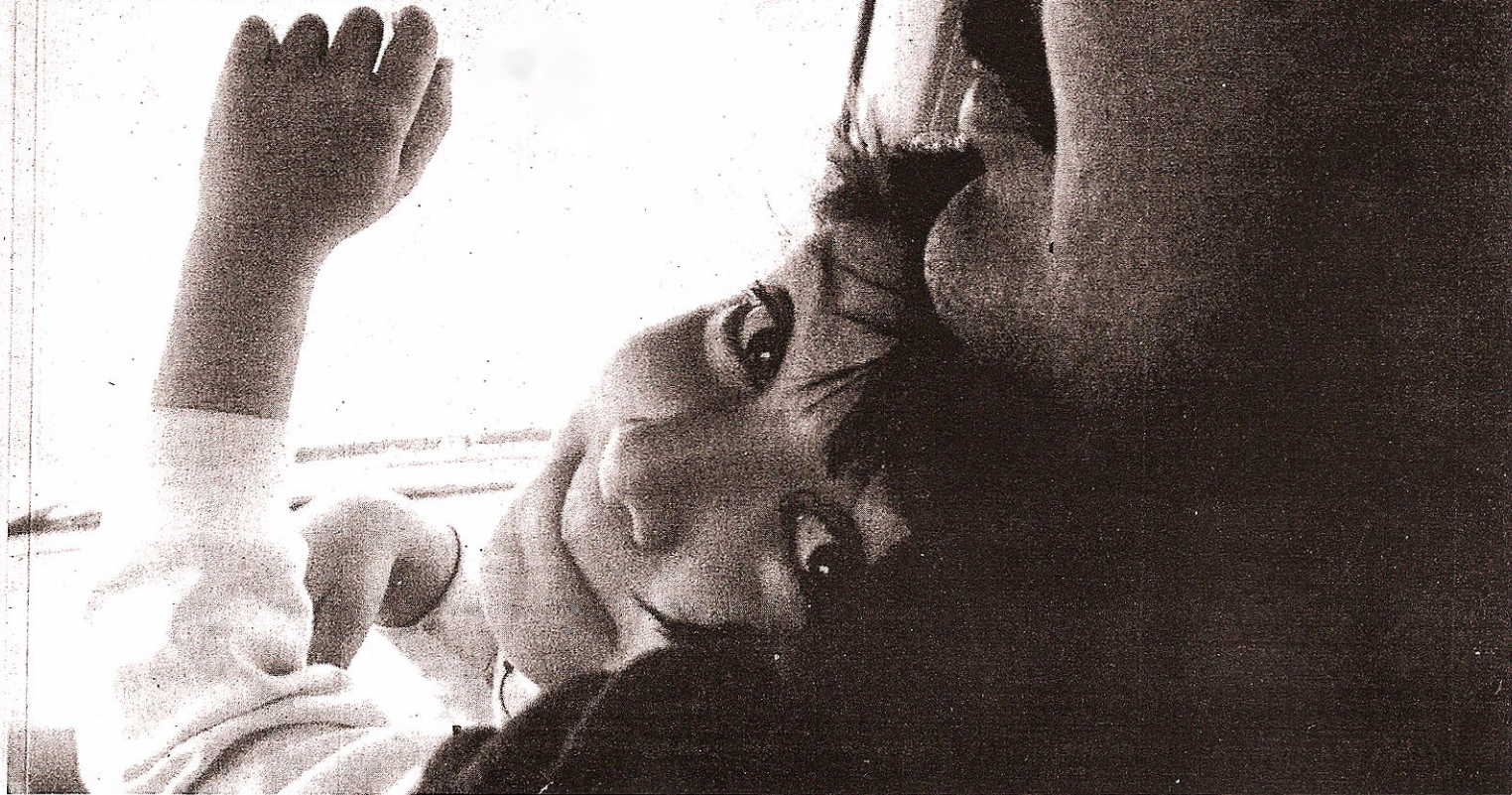


## Sharing her Iranian jewels

Concordian Anna Fahr documents another side of her culture in *Khaneh Ma: These Places We Call Home*



From Fahr's *Khaneh Ma: These Places We Call Home*

BY MICHAEL-OLIVER HARDING

When Anna Fahr was awarded the Outstanding Overall Achievement in Film Production in 2003 by the Mel Hoppenheim School of Cinema, she already had the outline for a documentary that would trace three generations of her extended family in mind. Three years later, *Khaneh Ma: These Places We Call Home* finally materializes. In her film, the recent Concordia grad takes viewers on a personal journey back to her country of cultural origin, Iran. Having been away from the region for over ten years, Fahr reacquaints herself with family and immerses herself in a culture she still identifies with. *Khaneh Ma* is a compelling family portrait and a record of the immigrant experience, complete with glimpses into the little-known aspects of Iranian culture. *The Link* caught up with Fahr to explore her labour of love.

**TL: *Khaneh Ma* takes us into the lives of Iranians who choose to stay in their home country and those who live abroad. What do you think sets them apart?**

**AF:** I think it's all a matter of personal choice, there's no definite answer. My grandfather, who's a character in the film, dedicated his entire life to working in his community and was very actively involved in developing his own city. He's an example of someone who, in spite of all the political instability in the country, has been completely determined to stick it out, and it's a very noble thing to do... people who may

be willing to sacrifice their personal advancement for the betterment of their nation. In my mind, he really embodies that national pride and it's through him that I discover a lot about the culture.

**TL: Many members of a diasporic community are both surprised and comforted through their experiences travelling to their home country. Was this the case for you?**

**AF:** It was this time around. When I went back ten years earlier as a young teenager, it was a very trying experience because of the restrictions that were imposed on me. Having to cover your head in the heat of the summer was not something that I was used to. It was hard for me because I wasn't comfortable speaking the language either and I felt disconnected from the culture.

But this time around, I was a lot more open, so covering up didn't bother me, and I was an adult, so I was more prepared for any cultural shock that was in store for me. I was ready to confront those aspects of not feeling really related to any culture.

**TL: How do you define "home"?**

**AF:** I don't, actually. I think it's such a complex notion to begin with, and that's why I gave that title to my film, because you can't pinpoint what home is when you come from a mixed background. I'm of Iranian descent, born in the US, raised in Ottawa, living in Montreal for the past 6 years, and now I'm moving back to the US for the summer, so I'm really all over the map! What my film achieves best is that it

conveys humanity through characters that an audience can relate to. In doing so, it breaks down barriers of culture and becomes a very universal film.

**TL: When western media brings up the subject of Iran, it is usually to condemn some objectionable attribute that comes neatly packaged in loaded terminology like "a hotbed for fundamentalists," "the nuclear terror" or "oppressive and misogynist laws." Do you find this portrayal to be accurate?**

**AF:** No, I think they're misconceptions and I get frustrated at the extent to which the media tries to perpetuate them. For example, I screened the film to some people who were shocked because I didn't feed them images of religious fundamentalism, or any of the images that they were expecting to see. Instead, I show more universal things like families celebrating together and preparing for someone's departure to a new country. Some people reacted negatively because they were expecting your more stereotypical imagery of Iran.

I was not only shocked at reactions from non-Iranians, but also from Iranians themselves. Granted, these are people who left the country a long time ago and under different conditions—such as exile—so I think that they harboured this resentment towards Iran. And it's the sort of thing that I can't understand because I've never experienced exile. What I explained to them, when they asked why I didn't focus on the

human rights violations, [it was because] from a distant, second generation perspective, I see things quite differently.

**TL: Beyond all of this political gossiping of an "Iranian threat," one thing the country is also getting international recognition for is its cinema d'auteur. Are people in Iran aware—and proud—of the immense pool of talent they hold?**

**AF:** Definitely. There are a lot of things that Iranians are proud of in terms of their culture, and cinema is certainly one of them. For Iranians, acclaimed director like Abbas Kiarostami are definitely an emblem of national pride.

**TL: What aspects of Iranian culture do you want people to discover through your film?**

**AF:** I guess that Iranians are exactly like anybody else, anywhere else. Iranians love to laugh, dance, be social and welcome guests, whether they're cousins or strangers. Tourists never go there, but if they only knew what a welcoming body of people Iranians are! Whenever I think of what I want to do in terms of future projects, I always see my work taking me back there. Iran is a wealth of beauty—culture, language, people—and I'm hoping that that comes through beyond all of this nuclear talk!

**Khaneh Ma completed its run at the NFB Cinema last Sunday, but check out [www.khanehmamovie.com](http://www.khanehmamovie.com) for information on upcoming screenings.**