



A CONTRAIMAGE PRODUCTION

پسرانی با گوش های شکسته

# BOYS WITH BROKEN EARS

A FILM BY NIMA SHAYEGHI





**BOYS WITH BROKEN EARS** is an intimate look at the aspirations and struggles of a handful of young Iranian wrestlers as they prepare for the biggest event of their lives; the world championship in Europe. It's a social tale set against the qualms of committing one's life to a dream at a young age.

With unprecedented access to the national youth team, the film follows five characters from impoverished background as they journey through the most challenging year of the lives, examining their beliefs and aspirations along the way.

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Wrestling is a very popular sport in Iran with historical roots in the country's religion and mythology. It is like football for the Brazilians or boxing for the Cubans.

Iran has consistently produced outstanding world champions that have gone on to win gold and silver at the Olympics despite very little financial support from the government. However almost all wrestlers come from the slums and poverty-stricken districts and wrestling has provided a very slim chance to make something of their lives. As a result two million youngsters try to make it to the national youth team every year, but only a handful do, most of whom find themselves in an uncompromising situation of having to hold down jobs to help their families survive while also spending all their time training to keep their dreams alive.

Caught in this crossroads between a sport they love and the realities of their harsh circumstances they soon realise that even with a gold medal their lives will hardly change, and this dream is a luxury that they cannot afford.

The film at its core is a human story, but it is loaded with themes of social identity in Iran and the confrontation of traditional and modern values. All this is set against each character's decision whether to continue pursuing this love or not.

Characters include Payam and Massoud, two childhood friends from the southern city of Izeh - of the recently settled nomad tribes of Bakhtiari. They have grown up and arisen through the ranks together. Payam sees life as a battle that you have to fight, "kill or get killed" is his mantra, whereas Massoud wants to plan his future more realistically, and unlike Payam he believes "courage alone doesn't get you anywhere". We follow them in their preparation for the championship and witness Payam injuring his knee ligament, whilst keeping it secret from his family; he wrestles through the pain to prove his worth to the coaches.

We also meet Peyman, from the conservative city of Boroujerd in central Iran. Peyman has recently lost his father, and now it is up to his older brother to support the whole family. Unlike some of the other wrestlers Peyman's school records are very impressive. His teachers try to stop him from continuing wrestling "don't become just another wasted talent in this country, you will ruin your youth in wrestling" they tell him. At the end wrestling won, he changed school and studies lighter subjects in order to pursue his wrestling ambitions. He came very close to losing his dreams in the championship at the prospect of being forced to forfeit his match against an Israeli wrestler - whom Iranian athletes are not allowed to compete against.



Interview with the director of  
**BOYS WITH BROKEN EARS** / Nima Shayeghi

**What were the initial inspirations behind making Boys with Broken Ears?**

Initially I was writing for a fiction film, set in Tehran, about a teenage boy from a traditional family. The story was about him testing his beliefs and questioning his own background and identity. The character happened to be a wrestler. When I began researching the wrestling communities, especially young wrestlers, I became really fascinated by the subject and the role it plays in the Iranian society. Gradually I started imagining the film as a documentary and found similarities to the predicaments of the wider generation of the Iranian youth - 60% of Iran's population is below 30 years.

As I got closer to them, more and more I saw their story more as a doomed love story. They sacrifice everything at a young age but then gradually they become aware that even if they become world champions there is little financial reward, and considering almost all the wrestlers in Iran come from deprived backgrounds that is a huge undertaking, but still they can't stop. I was interested to portray the vulnerabilities of these boys in this stereotypically macho environment.

**Why have you chosen wrestling to tell a social story, what is the connection?**

Wrestling is more than just a sport in Iran. It has been fused with ideologies from religion and tradition as well as politics. Traditionally wrestlers were considered heroes and represented an intricate code of honour for which they were idolised. However in contemporary Iran the position of The Wrestler and what exactly it represents is somewhat more ambiguous. This has nuances with the wider questions about the so-called identity crisis in Iran. I thought of wrestling as a powerful tool to portray the story about this young generation whose society has not much to offer them and wrestling becomes an escape route out. They sacrifice everything for the few seconds glory of standing on a podium; "to be the best in the world". Their country joins in and celebrates with them but then forgets them almost as quickly as they come off the podium.

The film intentionally revolves around the teenage boys for whom the question of whether they should commit themselves to this love or not is still very fresh and consequently they have to test their own belief and character.



For instance I was quite moved by the school teachers of one the wrestlers who were trying to stop him from wrestling. They believed he is throwing his life away, considering most of them have to almost stop school if they want to continue professionally.

**What were the challenges of making this film in Iran?**

From a practical point of view we had a very difficult shoot in Tehran. We were stopped on a daily basis and questioned as our permits were checked and rechecked. But filming outside Tehran was much smoother, even though the conditions were more tough. The local communities were absolutely amazing in helping us however they could.

**The film travels around Iran and portrays different areas rarely seen in the west, was that a conscious choice to emphasis on geographical locations of the characters?**

The filming took almost a year and half during which time we travelled across Iran and abroad, from big cities to small villages. For me the making of this film in itself was an incredible social study, delving into the lives of these communities and observing their hardship but also how they view life. From the very beginning these atmospheres were a character in the film.

The camera follows the wrestlers constantly as they move through space, in the camps, their homes, gyms, and schools, as we see how these people from different parts of Iran come together to represent “a national team”.

**How did you get the trust of these kids, do you think they wanted their stories to be told?**

What was interesting was that almost none of the young wrestlers in the film had any idea what a documentary film is. Initially they thought that it was a sport reportage, and they expected to see themselves on TV at night. But then as they saw that we were there

all the time they opened up wholeheartedly with an astonishing degree of honesty. This is strongly felt by both the kids and also their coaches during the world championship.

**What do you think about the recent decision of The International Olympic Committee to take down wrestling from Olympics, and how that decision would affect the lives of these characters and their future?**

Wrestling is one the oldest sport in the world; one has to view it as a classical art like a classical dance. It is incredibly rhythmic and balletic. It might not have the popularity that comes with other sports but it needs to be preserved like any other ancient tradition in human cultural history.

Unfortunately during the making of this film I also observed first hand the ugly political dynamics that is present in international sport, which definitely leaves a sour taste.

**Do you think this is a timely film, given Iran in the news and its current politics?**

I believe Iran, perhaps like some other countries in the Middle East, is at a particular junction trying to deal with its traditional values and its present identity. Younger generations are confused about what to accept or reject from their past whilst trying to modernise and the older generations are too worn out and their ideologies too disbanded as the country slowly comes to terms with its highly eventful and somewhat traumatic past few decades.

This film was an attempt to move away from the stereotype definitions and look closer at the vulnerabilities of Iran’s younger generations.





#### DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Nima Shayeghi is an award-winning director. His short films, "The Still" and "Hear Now", have been screened and awarded at various international festivals, namely Dubai, Edinburgh, Rome. He has an academic background at the postdoctoral level and has published articles on contemporary Iranian music and art. His latest series of short documentaries commissioned by Aljazeera and BBC on contemporary artists is currently being screened at various international exhibitions and festivals.

He has also worked as a music video director, collaborating with world music artists.

#### THE PRODUCTION COMPANY

Contra Image is an award-winning, independent production company based in London. We pride ourselves in producing thought-provoking, intelligent and visually distinctive films in both fiction and documentaries.

Our projects are diverse, exploring interests and issues of domestic and global concern with an emphasis on human stories that are not ordinarily seen or heard in the mainstream media. We work with broadcasters, such as BBC; Aljazeera and Sky, and a network of international filmmakers across cultural landscapes and in different regions of the world to bring "local" stories to international audiences.

CONTRAIMAGE

## / BOYS WITH BROKEN EARS

Film credits in short

Writer - Director: Nima Shayeghi  
Producers: Golriz Kolahi, David Alamouti, Nima Shayeghi  
Producer in Iran: Siamak Shayeghi  
Executive Producer: Eraj Shirvani, Dominique Young, Fereydoun Ave

Editor: Arttu Salmi  
Main Camera: Iraj Haghighipour, Roger Eaton  
Music: Kieron Maguire

Sound Designer: James Morgan, Ali Abolsedgh  
Sound Mixer: Stephen Bond, Hossein Abolsedgh  
Colorist: Malcolm Ellison (CrystalLight TV)  
Production company contact: Contra Image  
Contact: info@pinknoisefilms.com

Exact Running Time:  
Theatrical Version: 1:18:05  
TV Version: 53:41  
Countries of Filming: Hungary and Iran  
Countries of Production: UK / Iran  
Year of Production: 2013  
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