



# I AM NEDA

## NICOLE KIAN SADIGHI DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT



As the first time producer and writer of “I Am Neda” this will also be my directorial debut.

Although I was born in Iran, I was a very young child when my journalist parents and I were exiled from our motherland and made a home in London, England. I lived most of my life there and eventually graduated from Brooklands Performing Arts School in order to pursue my dream of acting. The experience of growing up as an exile since I was knee high to a grasshopper has always had a heavy and somewhat strange presence on my identity and is a constant reminder that you can't always wholeheartedly belong to one place. I recall returning only once to Iran for 6 months. Being placed in kindergarten during that time was not a positive experience, as I didn't know the language well and was always the outcast called that “English girl”. Likewise upon my return to England, I was considered that “Iranian girl”. No matter where I went I was never accepted as part of the “tribe”.

In spite of what you would think, this paradox has surprisingly become a source of strength and a broadening of my horizon, which I believe has ultimately made me a better artist and film maker by giving me an insight and intuitiveness of the world around me. So recently deciding to migrate to the United States came as somewhat of an easy change to this nomadic actress and writer, despite my love of my hometown, London.

However, one thing that has become more evident over the years has been an overwhelming sense of my Persian roots and history that I simply cannot deny. When talking about Iran, it is unavoidable to talk about human rights violations in the same breath, and so I became involved with various NGO's and human rights groups and was invited to several international events as a keynote speaker. But I was still unsatisfied. I felt like I needed to make more of an impression on the world. But I didn't know how. And then I heard about Neda.

**The story of Neda was the catalyst that I needed so that the problems of Iran could reach a wider audience. Thus, it could be said that destiny has lead me to find the insight and inspiration to write, produce and direct my very first film, “I Am Neda”.**

Like so many others I have been touched by what has been going on inside Iran, particularly during the last couple of years, **where the world has bared witness to the true events in the Middle East via Twitter, Facebook, Youtube and other social media.** Mobile reporting has changed the face of our society and if we had not had access to this new technology we would never have learned of the tale of this one young ordinary woman on the backdrop of extraordinary circumstances.

**Everyone from U2 to Bon Jovi to CNN, FOX News, BBC, NY Times, Time Magazine, London Times, Oxford University and even President Obama himself have paid homage to the girl called Neda.**



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Neda's story has touched the lives of millions around the world. Her face and name have become an important symbol for freedom because she brought the world's attention to one of history's most formidable events.

Perhaps you may already know the story of Neda, in which case I am sure you will understand my sense to tell the tale with honesty and integrity. And if you don't already know the story of this courageous young woman, then you will soon have the opportunity to find out by watching my film.

When I first made the commitment to bring this story to the screen, I made a vow to myself to tell it with as much truth and quality as I could. **I then realized that I was not only retelling history but also, by default, documenting it. I felt a huge responsibility on my shoulders.**

**Although the film is in Farsi, and even though it was originally supposed to be in English, I never wanted it to be just for Iranian audiences. Most Iranians will relate to it on a personal level, but I believe this movie is a human story that transcends all language barriers.**

**The making of this film has truly and sincerely been a labor of love and a real passion project of mine, which has come with its own unique challenges.**

To begin with, I'm **the daughter of Iranian ex-patriots; which means I am not allowed to return to the country of my birth and therefore I was unable to film on location in Iran. With the onslaught of Iranian filmmakers, such as Jafar Panahi being imprisoned in an effort to silence and punish them, I knew that I had a greater advantage which is the freedom to make a movie in the west.**

In the absence of being able to travel to Iran or having limited access to key people for interviews, **I spent up to a year researching Neda's story thoroughly. It was extremely important that as a first time director, there could be no allowance for misinformation or errors of a true event in history.** Therefore if I wasn't sure of something then it could have no place in the script. Fortunately, in the age of online media and many, many documented interviews and reports, I was able to substantiate facts in order to tell the story with precision, whilst delivering with theatrical flair.

Although I originally wrote the script in English, after my third draft I soon came to my senses and realized that this movie had to be in Farsi! It is about a young Iranian woman, inside Iran, on the backdrop of Iran's elections. There was just no two ways about it. My next challenge was the small matter that I don't read or write Farsi, and so with the help of a translator, both she and I went through the arduous affair of going back and forth with many versions and rewording of transcripts to make sure that the tone would remain translatable in both Farsi and English without losing its Persian essence and feel of time and place. The difficulty of the translations did not stop in post-production and continued to be a challenge through the editing process, as my editor also did not speak Farsi.



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With a stellar cast attached, I have been extremely fortunate with having some very dedicated actors on board. Mary Apick, is a veteran Iranian actress who has received the Moscow Film Festival Best Actress Award for "Dead End" and who is a member of Yari Film group, that made the Academy Award winning movie "CRASH". I must confess that when it came to casting, I was a bag of nerves in approaching Mary. Not only is she revered in the industry and Persian community but she has been an actress who I have idealized for a long time, so you can only imagine my euphoria when she agreed to be involved. As passionate about her acting as she is about her advocacy of so many causes, she was the consummate professional from whom I learned much during this process.

**APoetNomadAli as he likes to be called is an up and coming musician and extremely talented actor, who has shared the stage with the likes of Christina Milian but is one of those special people who just has a natural instinct for acting.** The dedicated pro that he is, he was needed for a reshoot and despite his dislocated shoulder, he soldiered on like the trooper that he is, without one ounce of complaining. If anything it was he who kept the crews' spirits up during the long night of filming on a cold windy Burbank rooftop.

Lastly, owing to the fact that Neda was such a source of inspiration for me, that through my extensive research I felt I had gotten to know her on such a profound level that I could write the script and play her in the film. I did my best to get to know her through my research without having ever met her or speaking to her family.

I listened to the songs she liked, I read the books she read, I heard of the dreams she had. Everything I could find out about her I absorbed the best I could, and I used everything I had discovered and used it to tell her story to the best of my abilities. Every revelation I discovered about her on my journey from beginning to end, became more of a driving force to pay tribute to her message as I saw it through my eyes. I became so steeped in her story that I felt, in my own small way, I was becoming part of it myself.

Once casting was completed, the next challenge was that everyone but Mary spoke very basic Farsi.

APoetNomadAli, Vida and I had each had been children of Persian ex-patriots, and so English had been our mother tongue. **Despite our Persian backgrounds neither of us spoke past first grade level Farsi. However, with the assistance of a dialogue coach each one of us spent days prepping and learning the dialogue in Farsi.** It was an arduous task and painfully slow at first, but practice was the key. I must add that I couldn't have chosen a better pair of actors than APoetNomadAli and Vida, who put their time, dedication and wholehearted devotion into this difficult mission of rediscovering our roots together.



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The second challenge was being on set! As a first time director, directing myself in the role and producing the film from own script, it was extremely difficult to keep track of all those hats! Some may call me crazy (and I might be one of them!) but I had to get this done and this was the best way I felt I could do it.

Once I had begun the editing process I realized there were things that needed to be changed and I began working with a highly competent and extremely **delightful Editor, cinematographer and a director in his own right, David Bartlett. Besides being an award winning film maker with credits on films like 'Pulp Fiction', 'Total Recall', 'Speed' and 'Point Break' to name but a few, he also had a full post production facility that actually worked.** Through working with him I decided that a reshoot was needed and a re-editing that we worked on together; that became the film that you are watching now. He was especially helpful during the reshoots as he had a great deal of experience as a **cinematographer for using the RED camera, which we had used for initial principal photography.**

**Once he was on board I found an extremely skilled RedOne camera operator, Ron McPherson who has worked with the likes of Tarantino.** I cannot deny that Dave and Ron and the great little 2<sup>nd</sup> unit crew I had, raised the bar even higher, and I could not be more pleased with the outcome.

The feeling throughout this whole journey has been like a rollercoaster ride filled with anxiety, excitement, worry, tears and many sleepless nights; but also lots of laughter and loving support of encouragement. Every day has felt like a battle for quality and excellence. A battle I, my cast and my crew, were determined to win. I'd made a promise to myself that I would not let anything get in the way of telling the story of Neda and her legacy, and nothing would stop me from making this film the best success it could be. And now, that the film is finished, I can only hope that I have achieved what I set out to do and would not have disappointed her.

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