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Shakespeare's

MACBETH

Directed by Gaylord Walker

June 15, 16, 22 & 23, 2007 at 7:30 PM

June 17 & 24, 2007 at 2:00 PM

at ACE Youth Academy Stage, 39 W.10th Ave.

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Book by Joe DiPietro

Directed by Joe Zingo

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movies BY JASON BLAIR

Golnaz Farmani, Ida Sadeghi, Shayesteh Irani and
Nazanin Sedighzadeh in *Offside*



Goals

Six women sneak into an Iranian soccer match

OFFSIDE: Directed by Jafar Panahi. Written by Panahi and Shadmehr Rastin. Cinematography, Rami Agami. Music, Yuval Barazani. Starring Safdar Samandar, Sima Mobarak-Shahi and Shayesteh Irani. Sony Pictures Classics, 2007. PG. 88 minutes. In Persian with English subtitles. ★★☆☆☆

At first blush, *Offside*, the new film by director Jafar Panahi (*The White Balloon*), doesn't appear to have much in common with absurdist theater. After all, *Offside*, in which six girls sneak into a World Cup qualifying match between Iran and rival Bahrain, is a naturalistic, almost documentary-style film about the universal appeal of soccer, Iran's most popular sport. But Panahi has more on his mind than an exposé of women at public sporting events, from which they've been banned since 1979. For about 40 of the film's almost 90 minutes, *Offside* achieves the quality of a Beckett or Ionesco play, during which gender, place and even time itself are all called into question.

Don't misunderstand: *Offside* is no *Waiting for Godot* or *Rhinoceros*. Panahi was inspired to make *Offside* when the director, a controversial figure in Iran, tried to escort his wife and daughter to a soccer game. As expected, the women were turned away at the gate; when Panahi's daughter managed to sneak in moments later, the director felt the kernel of a story taking shape. In order to make *Offside* appear as realistic as possible, Panahi used non-actors, encouraging the girls to create their own male disguises. None of the characters have names. There is very little music in *Offside*, other than the singing of traditional soccer hymns, and while the opening scenes feel realistic — a costumed girl rides the bus toward the stadium along with two dozen unruly boys — the girl appears timid and destined for trouble. She couldn't pass for a boy if her life depended on it, which it does.

Once discovered, the girls are brought to a makeshift cell atop the stadium, and it's here that *Offside* becomes something

extraordinary. At first, the soldiers on duty assert their authority naturally, their manner confident but flat and bureaucratic. But it quickly becomes clear that these men are ineffectual, afraid, trapped — and they're actually boys in men's clothing. Compared to the soldiers, the girls are smarter, tougher and more knowledgeable about soccer. As the stadium crowd roars in the background, we sense that the girls, although trapped in a pen, are far more alive than their male counterparts, who are prisoners to an oppressive tradition and culture. The soldiers are assimilated and emasculated, creating an absurdist situa-

In a makeshift cell atop the soccer stadium, *Offside* becomes something extraordinary

tion: The only reason the boys have the upper hand is because of the rules, which are arbitrary and stupid. The girls actually begin to coach the male soldiers in the art of metaphor, disguise and — not surprisingly — soccer, a fitting counterpoint to the actual game within the stadium.

Eventually, a man referred to as "the Chief" arrives, ushering everyone onto a bus for transport to the police station. A true bureaucrat, the Chief actually wields some authority, fracturing the delicate balance of the film's middle section. The final bus ride is a joyous romp as boys and girls alike listen to the finale of the game on the radio, but we never re-enter that strange, philosophical bubble we inhabited at the stadium. Still, *Offside* is a meaningful and occasionally powerful film, one that manages to say a great deal with very little fanfare. **EW**

