

Experiencing Iranian Culture Through a Master's Films

By SUSAN HODARA

Jonathan Demme first encountered the films of Bahman Farmanara, the Iranian filmmaker, at Lincoln Center's 2007 retrospective of his work. "I was completely knocked out," Mr. Demme said recently by telephone.

Since then, the two have been corresponding by e-mail. They will finally meet and share the stage at the Jacob Burns Film Center, of which Mr. Demme is a member of the board and where Mr. Farmanara has begun a monthlong stint as the Burns Center's fourth international filmmaker-in-residence.

The filmmaker-in-residence program, which began last March, brings accomplished artists from abroad to live, work and teach at the Burns Center. It is financed through the center's Fellowship for International Understanding Through Film, which was established with a grant from Kathryn W. Davis, a philanthropist and part-time Tarrytown resident who turned 103 on Thursday.

"One of the things Kathryn told us was that in her lifetime she wanted to see more peace in the world," said Susan Todd, the Burns Center's director of the Project for International Understanding.

"We agreed that cinema can create great understanding by bringing people the experience of being in another culture," Ms. Todd said. "We see the fellowship as a way to give our audiences direct contact with somebody from a culture they might know little about, somebody whose films are particularly special and demonstrative of that culture."

Born in Tehran, Mr. Farmanara, 68, is an award-winning director as well as a screenwriter, producer and distributor. He was instrumental in shaping Iran's New Wave cinema in the 1970s. During the '80s, he and his family lived in Canada. Upon his return to Iran, he was barred from making films until 2000, when he wrote, directed and played the lead



VISION Bahman Farmanara helped shape Iran's New Wave.

MASOUD ASHTARI

in "Smell of Camphor, Fragrance of Jasmine."

"Bahman is one of only a few filmmakers popular both before and after the revolution," Ms. Todd said. "He is an ideal fellow because he's not living outside his country, and he hasn't become a dissident. In fact, he is very much for his country. He has a lot to tell us about what living in Iran has been like."

During his stay, Mr. Farmanara is presenting "Bahman Farmanara and Iran," a two-week series of 12 Iranian films, including six documentaries by other Iranian directors. Two documentaries and two of Mr. Farmanara's films have already been shown. On Thursday, after a screening of "Smell of Camphor, Fragrance of Jasmine," Mr. Demme will host a question-and-answer session with Mr. Farmanara, followed by a reception.

The other screenings include Mr. Farmanara's "Prince Ehtejab" on Feb. 28 and "House Built on Water" on March 7. The series concludes on March 11 with "Earthbound," Mr. Farmanara's newest film, followed by a question-and-answer session with the director.

"Bahman Farmanara and Iran," at the Jacob Burns Film Center, 364 Manville Road, Pleasantville. "Smell of Camphor, Fragrance of Jasmine" will be shown on Thursday at 7:15 p.m.; reception in the Jane Peck Gallery. For more information and additional screenings: (914) 747-5555 or burnsfilmcenter.org.