

Majidi Majidi about SUN CHILDREN

“Dreams flying up in the sky like pigeons”

12 year old Ali is handling his business in the streets of Tehran, walking and talking like a grown man. With his nose in so many (slightly criminal) cases, he is like a juggler keeping too many balls up in the air. One day he and his friends are hired for a mission: it is said that a treasure is hidden in the underground river, underneath a school building. Only by enrolling into that school, they might have a chance of getting their hands on the valuable goods. For a boy like Ali, school might be an even more challenging environment than the city streets.

Majidi: The story stands close to the life of main actor Rouhollah Zamani's, who had always worked as a child labourer. That is why he perfectly understood his role and why his body language looks so credible. In fact all young actors had similar backgrounds. Engaging them in this film was a positive thing - we added their life's experience to the story, and offered them something in return.

When the boys talk about their

dreams, they sound very practical. They don't dream of a sports car or a trip to Disneyland. They dream of having their own falafel shop or car wash.

Majidi: These are common dreams for child labourers. Regarded as poor nobodies, they have a big desire to prove themselves successful in the eyes of the world. By making this film, we did not only change their lives but also their dreams. They don't dream about money or cars anymore, they dream of becoming good actors. And they succeed. Rouhollah and the others are now involved in other film and TV projects. Now that people treat them with more respect, they are even motivated to continue their studies.

When a girl in the film is arrested, you are suggesting more than you actually show about how she is treated.

Majidi: She might get fined, or scolded, sometimes they might cut off her hair, but in my opinion state officers shouldn't act like that. We should help them to study, to learn a trade

and find a job. This is the ambition of the “School of Sun”. Such institutions are often financed through gifts. By showing this film in Iran and abroad, we grant them extra visibility.

You regularly ‘open up’ the imagination, having your camera looking up to the sky, to the roof of the shopping centre, the pigeons, the school bags flying over the wall...

Majidi: That is how children let their dreams fly up in the sky. Like pigeons high up in the air, there are no boundaries to their dreams.

The courtyard of the garage, the doors and windows, the housing block of the Afghan family... all your colours are rich and intense.

Majidi: The colours in this film are like characters, guiding us through the story and adding an extra layer of sensitivity. Some of these locations were real, others were constructed for the film. Some might look like black and white, like the lives of the main characters, but under a golden sun they grow rich in colours.



How did you shoot the final scenes in the underground canal?

Majidi: An underground river was constructed for the film. Working conditions there were extremely tough for all of us; me, the actors, the DoP... I had to descend through a narrow hole and into the canal to give instructions, with hardly room to move. Those were the most challenging days on the set.

–
Gert Hermans