



***Darbareye Elly (About Elly)* is a prospective LVCA dvd donation to the Ligonier Valley Library. Below is Kino Ken's review of that Cinema Guild dvd release.**

16 of a possible 20 points = ** = excellent film**

**Iran 2009 color 119 minutes subtitled live action feature mystery drama
Producers: Asghar Farhadi, Simaye Mehr, Mahmoud Razavi**

**Key: *indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance
(j) designates a juvenile performer**

Points:

- 2 Direction: Asghar Farhadi***
- 2 Editing: Hayedeh Safiyari**
- 1 Cinematography: Hossein Jafarian**
- 1 Lighting: Tehrani Shahrokh Zamani**
- 2 Screenplay: Asghar Farhadi***
- Script Supervision: Maryam Naraghi**
- Music Editing: Peyman Navidi Nahand**
- 1 Music: Hossein Zarouri and Andrea Bauer ("Song for Eli")**
- 1 Production Design: Asghar Farhadi**
- Set Decoration: Abtin Barghi**
- Costume Design: Asghar Farhadi**

Makeup: Mehrdad Mirkiani and Milad Ramezani

2 Sound Design: Nick Tonez*

Sound Editing Supervision: Mohammad Reza Delpak*

Sound Recording: Faraz Mesgari Abbasi* and Hassan Zahedi*

Sound Mixing: Ali Nouri*

Casting: Majid Farahbod*

2 Acting

2 Creativity

16 total points

Cast: Taraneh Alidoosti (Elly), Golshifteh Farahani* (Sepideh, wife of Amir), Merila Zare'i* (Shohreh, wife of Peyman), Mani Haghighi* (Amir, husband of Sepideh), Payman Maadi* (Peyman, husband of Shohreh), Ra'na Azadivar* (Naazi, wife of Manuchehr), Ahmad Mehranfar* (Manuchehr, husband of Naazi), Saber Abar (Alireza, fiancé of Elly), Milad BagheriFard (Manuchehr's brother), Sajjad Dolati (Mehran), Matin Fatourech (j)* (Arash, son of Sepideh and Amir), Abolfazl Heidari (j) (Hamed), Ehsan Nazari (j) (Mohamed), Mohamad Ramezani Pour (pilot of boat), Farshid Pourasghar (Farshid), Amir Hossein Rezaee (Arvin Sahandi), Az Rhmti (Ali), Kian Rostami (Hamed), Sasan Saeedi (Ali), Fardin Samadi (Saber), Sepehrchavoshi (Shahab), Parvaneh Tanha (Parvaneh), Emre Tetikel (Dorah), Kova Tilavpur (Jami), Nick Tonez (Sam), Amirhossein Yousefnia (Masoud)

Special Notes: There is no credit available from online sources for the juvenile performer playing Sepideh and Amir's kindergarten age daughter named Morvarid. There certainly should be! And where does Manuchehr's brother appear in the film? Who played the part of preschooler Anita, Arash's sister? What's the name of the landlady's son or grandson, who seems to regard scornfully actions of visitors from Tehran? Who played that role?

The last six lines of credits above reflect IMDB data, but may or may not be accurate. To put together this review, the reviewer wishes to thank especially Daniel Garrett for his review of *About Elly*, composed in October, 2018 titled "The Loss and Recovery of Identity: Appearance and Reality, Friendship and Betrayal in Asghar Farhadi's film *About Elly*" and published in *OFF:SCREEN's*

March, 2021 edition Volume 25, Issue 2-3, as well as Mark Dujsik's May 7, 2025 review of the film at the MARK REVIEWS MOVIES website. Laura Clifford's review of *About Elly* at www.reelingreviews.com and a highly detailed analysis of the film by Martin Purvis writing as The Film Sufi also supplied helpful background information about Farhadi's opus.

Darbareye Elly (About Elly) was Iranian director Asghar Farhadi's fourth feature film and the second to receive international acclaim. Released in 2009, it followed his 2006 breakthrough drama *Caharsanbe-Sun (Fireworks Wednesday)*, winner of a Gold Hugo for Best Film at the 2006 Chicago International Film Festival.

About Elly, like Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'avventura (The Adventure)*, begins in a city and moves shortly to more primitive surroundings. The city here is Tehran. Some unseen individuals push envelopes through a slot into darkness. According to the film's director, these contain alms for the poor. By making this charitable contribution donors will be rewarded, according to the Koran. It's also their hope safe travels will be guaranteed by such action. How ironic!

What viewers don't know is which key characters took this precaution. Why it matters is that identifying them would indicate who in the vacationing group actually takes Islam seriously.

In the picture's second scene, young adults in two vehicles exuberantly scream and jockey for a position as leading vehicle while passing through some mountain tunnel near the Caspian Sea coastal resort town of Chalus. There are three children in one of the cars: a boy named Arash and two girls, Arash's sister Anita and Morvarid. Other occupants are a single adult female named Elly, a recently-divorced adult male called Ahmad, and three adult couples: Sepideh and Amir, Naazi and Manouchehr, and Peyman and Shohreh. Their plan is to spend a three-day holiday enjoying fun, sun, and coolness away from hubbub, tension, and traffic typical of Tehran.

Sepideh's pursuing a private agenda, wishing to play matchmaker for Elly and Ahmad. Both of those individuals are aware of it. None of the rest are. Elly happens to be the kindergarten teacher of her daughter Morvarid. She knows through conversation with the instructress that Elly has a fiancé whose courtship has become distasteful. That's why listeners hear Elly command her

mother not to let anyone else know she's journeying out to the Caspian with some friends.

Through outright verbal bullying, Sepideh has managed to persuade that rather shy and socially pliable acquaintance to absent herself from the capital for at least overnight. She's also at least hinted about a possible love match resulting. Sepideh has apparently read Jane Austen's *Emma* and found a kindred spirit there.

This trip to the north Elly reluctantly agrees to. However, in a private cell phone conversation between mother and daughter, Elly assures the former she will return the next day. Mom, who should not be placed under undue stress while still only a month beyond a heart operation, is not to inform anyone else of her daughter's whereabouts. Leaving fiancé Alireza in the dark.

Arriving at their preferred villa, exuberant urbanites from Tehran are told by its elderly landlady that place is only available for one day. Not three.

Of course, Sepideh already knew that. She chose not to share such discouraging information beforehand with her post-collegiate chums. Is anything else available? Because there are newlyweds present. So claims the group's spokeswoman.

That comes as news to everyone else in her company. However, that ploy works, winning Tehranis a three-day stay in certainly one of the most dilapidated structures on the beach. With thoroughly dusty floors, broken window, holey roof, and exterior boiler for heating, it does offer one attractive offset: a fine view north to the Caspian Sea and its southern shoreline. Why parents would want three preteen youngsters to play in and around that kind of place is never revealed. Does this pass for quality parenting?

Of necessity, the bulk of daylight hours on Day One of their holiday is spent cleaning and unloading food, clothing, and contemporary necessities like cell phones from two cars. It should be noted Arash wastes no time running into the water and getting himself wet.

In order to maximize time together apart from the rest, Elly and Ahmad are delegated to make a trip to Chalus for additional supplies. This doesn't surprise them, as Sepideh has already informed them separately of her purpose in bringing them together. They converse amiably en route, free from pressures of eavesdroppers and eventually returning in time for supper.

After nightfall, an obliging landlady and one youth who seems to be a grandson bring extra bedding for the “newlyweds.” This proves most embarrassing. Neither Ahmad nor Elly are at all comfortable playing false roles thrust upon them by Sepideh’s glib tongue. Capping off their discomfiture is a completely misleading wedding ululation by Shohreh, who seems to have caught the spirit of make-believe from Amir’s spouse.

After makeshift dinner on the floor, men go outside to smoke while women clean up inside. Sepideh enters the veranda and polls the males to determine if they think Elly would make a good spouse for Ahmed. All agree to that in a democratic vote.

Elly herself, rebuffed when she attempts to participate in postprandial tidying, leaves the area, trying to communicate via cell phone with her mother. She’s unable to make contact near the beachfront bungalow.

This makes the others wonder. Is the newcomer simply shy around relative strangers? Or have those “white lies” they’ve fabricated offended her?

Later on the entire group participates in charades, a game where mute actions alone serve as clues to a mysterious phrase. Elly and Arash each win a round, indicating both possess excellent non-verbal intelligence.

Fractures begin the next morning. Elly wants to leave immediately after breakfast. She has pledged, as viewers know, to return to Tehran that day.

Sepideh has other plans for her. To stymie the teacher’s imminent departure, she’s hidden Elly’s cell phone in her own bag. Furthermore, she insists vehemently everyone in her party remains shorebound until the following day.

Elly grudgingly acquiesces. Or seems to.

While Sepideh and four men go outside to play volleyball, Shohreh and Naazi remain indoors to catch up on housekeeping. Shohreh’s supposed to keep an eye on three children heading for the beach. Instead, she requests Elly to do so. The woman is a kindergarten teacher. She must have had plenty of kid supervision experience. Right?

Meanwhile, Anita wanders along the sands, inspecting and collecting. Not paying any attention whatsoever to her brother Arash, who quickly runs into the waves and begins bobbing up and down as if inside a park wave pool. Morvarid, older than Anita, has a kite she’s struggling to keep aloft. She asks Elly to assist. Which her teacher willingly does.

None of these females is watching Arash. One is scouting the ground and two are scanning the sky, becoming enraptured as their kite ascends at last. Of course this signifies a strengthening breeze. Which ought to tip Elly off about rising waves.

Then the kite falls into the sea.

A later recapping from Morvarid of what happened next results from high-pressured quizzing by her dad. Apparently Elly and the girl move to the other side of a concrete wall dividing property lots to retrieve the downed kite. At that point it becomes obvious to Elly Arash is battling to stay afloat as taller waves knock him off his feet and threaten submersion.

Here the film intentionally becomes evasive. What audiences see is Anita running uphill to the sportive four – Sepideh has just gone back to the bungalow – screaming “Arash is in the water.” Despite her puckered face and shrill urgency, the men respond unconcernedly, saying they already know he’s in the water, then quickly resuming their game. Only when Morvarid tearfully dashes up a few seconds later with a better explanation do so-called adults catch on to what’s happening.

Arash is located after several false starts. He’s ultimately pulled to shore by Ahmad. Not before frantic Sepideh, who has heard the uproar, tries herself to reach the imperiled child, plunging in fully clothed. Iranian Sharia law would not allow any divestiture of a female in public even in an extreme emergency such as the one confronting her here.

Then Elly goes missing again. This time she doesn’t return.

What has happened? Did she try to save Arash and drown in the attempt? Or has she left to hitchhike back to Tehran? No one knows except Morvarid, who’s not yet been interrogated. And possibly Anita, a child too young to understand drowning and death.

From this point, recriminations abound among group members.

More lies are required when yet another previously unknown character emerges and must be manipulated. Each adult visitor to the Caspian takes steps to shield his or her own honor, especially when having to deal with police interrogation and Elly’s mother.

But, asks Sepideh, what about Elly’s honor?

To tell more would be to ruin suspense.

The Cinema Guild dvd release of *About Elly* is a February, 2026 LVCA donation to the Ligonier Valley Library's Classic Cinema Collection. To find out how this drama ends, please check it out from there when it becomes available.

As with Farhadi's *A Separation*, the entire ensemble perform superbly, making each scene utterly realistic. Mani Haghighi's frustrated spouse Amir, Golshifteh Farahani's incessantly complicating Sepideh and Shahab Hosseini's playfully agreeable Ahmad take top acting honors. There's plenty of powerhouse support from Merila Zare'i as negligent mama Shohreh, Ra'na Azadivar embodying ever-agreeable Naazi, Payman Maadi in the role of browbeating paternal authority Peyman who's intent on rationalizing everything, and Ahmad Merhanfar as Manouchehr, a man convinced Destiny rules life and Elly was fated to drown.

Sound recording, editing, and mixing capture background splash and crash of sea waves and pretty much the entire range in volume of human voices with utmost fidelity to realism.

However, it is Asghar Farhadi's perfectly entangling screenplay, allowing each of the film's ordinary characters to display serious flaws hiding behind normal social conventions, which bears primary responsibility for making *About Elly* a cerebral as well as sensual treat. At first, all appears mundane and jolly. Then it gradually becomes more ambiguous as superficial judgments are rendered and key facts kept hidden. Finally, truths emerge, though only under duress. Darkening still more, another set of deceptions, perhaps even certain self-deceptions, are employed to remove guilt feelings. No heroes or villains show themselves. Farhadi succeeds admirably in creating empathy for all persons involved in this drama.

His extensive directing experiences, first in television dramas and then in live action short films, prepared him well for this assignment. The director has declared his intention was to create motion pictures that would make audiences think. He has certainly done so here.

Editing also plays a crucial role, both in roving camera shots of interiors where characters sometimes hide themselves in shadowed recesses, and in hand-held camera sequences shot in surging seawater.

Production design is quite adequate. Lighting seems a bit too feeble in some night scenes within the bungalow.

Due to scenes of a near-drowning and one wife-beating episode, *About Elly* is not suitable viewing for preteens. It also contains several profanities. Adults looking for mature film fare will find plenty of satisfaction in this drama, as well as an extension of their knowledge of Farhadi's film craft.

Four bonus features are part of this dvd release:

1. a one minute, forty-five second theatrical trailer
2. a press conference at the 59th Berlinale with director Asghar Farhadi, Golshifteh Farahani, Peyman Maadi, Ra'na Azadivar, and Merila Zare'i where, most notably, the director explains what is happening in *About Elly's* opening scene Runtime: fifty-one minutes
3. a documentary titled *From Iran, A Separation* focusing on how that film was received by both the internal Iranian public and the Iranian diaspora in the process of accumulating awards at home and abroad

Directed by Azadeh Moussavi and Kourush Atae. Color. 2013.

Runtime: fifty-two minutes

4. a booklet with an essay about this film by Tina Hassannia, author of *Asghar Farhadi: Life and Cinema*

About Elly has won the following awards:

Silver Bear for Best Director at the 2009 Berlinale in Germany

Best Screenplay at the 2009 Asia Pacific Screen Awards in Brisbane, Australia

NETPAC Award at the 2009 Brisbane International Film Festival

Public Choice Award at the 2009 10th Asiatica Film Festival in Rome, Italy

Best Film Award at the 2009 Tribeca Film Festival in New York City, New York, United States

Crystal Simorgh Award for Best Director at the 2009 Fajr Film Festival in Tehran, Iran

Public Choice Award at the 2009 Fajr Film Festival in Tehran, Iran

Best Film Award at the Kerala International Film Festival in Kerala, India