

Tarik Shah documentary wins Audience Choice Award

"Tarik Shah: Don't Play Like Them" has been honored at the Indie Short Film Festival in Charlottesville, Virginia

LOS ANGELES, CA, UNITED STATES, March 28, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The new documentary "Tarik Shah: Don't Play Like Them" will be screening at 3 film festivals in April, after winning the prestigious Audience Choice Award at the Indie Short Film Festival.

At a time when federal law enforcement actions and immigration enforcement operations dominate national headlines — from ICE raids to protests in Minneapolis and beyond — a new documentary tells a compelling story that foreshadowed today's troubles.

"Tarik Shah: Don't Play Like Them," a documentary by filmmaker Barry Rubinow, tells the story of a musician at the top of his game, who was entrapped by the FBI, and arrested on terrorism charges.

BEFORE THE ARREST: A RISING FORCE IN JAZZ

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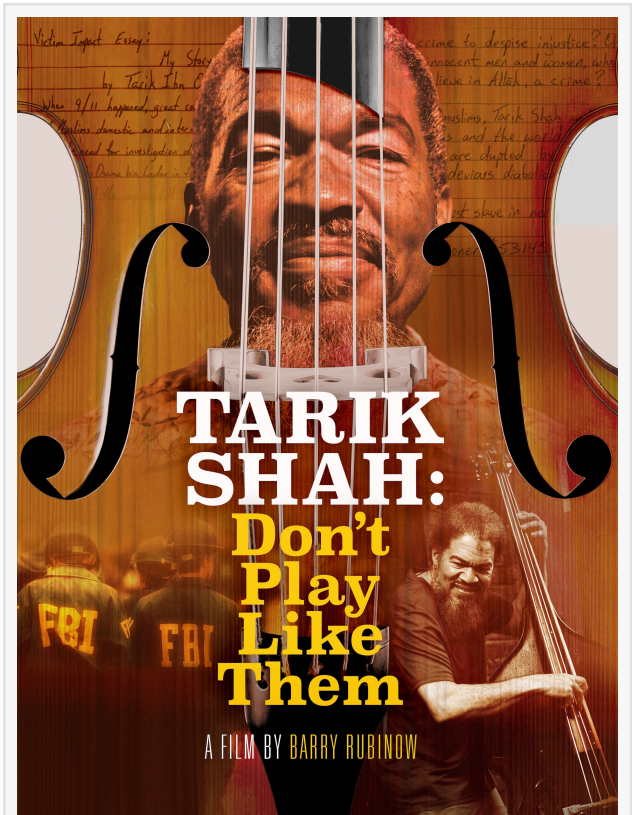
I did not realize I had been their target from as far back as 2001”

Tarik Shah

Long before his arrest in 2005, Tarik Shah was a respected presence in the New York jazz world.

He began playing upright bass at age 12. By 14, he was already working gigs. At 16, he studied with the legendary Slam Stewart, whose résumé included collaborations with Art Tatum, Charlie Parker, and Dizzy Gillespie.

By his early 20s, Shah was touring and recording in Europe with jazz icon Betty Carter. Over the years he performed with Dizzy Gillespie, Pharoah Sanders, Ahmad Jamal, Randy Weston, Abbey



Check out this compelling story

Lincoln, Barry Harris, and The Duke Ellington Orchestra.

In 1993, he performed with the Duke Ellington Orchestra at President Bill Clinton's inaugural ball.

He was a working professional at the top of his craft.

A STORY THAT FEELS URGENT AGAIN

Arrested in 2005 in an FBI counterterrorism sting operation during the post-9/11 era, Shah spent over 2 and a half years in complete isolation, an innocent man forced into solitary confinement for being Muslim. He was forced to plead guilty to one terrorism charge, so that he could avoid spending the rest of his life in jail. While prosecutors described the case as necessary national security work, Shah has long maintained he was lured into a case shaped by fear and political climate.



Tarik in the crosshairs



Tarik Shah in a contemplative mood

Today, as communities across the country debate federal enforcement power, surveillance, immigration actions, and civil liberties — Shah's story resonates with renewed urgency.

But this film is not a political argument.

It is a human one.

"Tarik Shah: Don't Play Like Them" explores:

- The cost of incarceration on artists and identity
- The power of stigma in American life
- The difficulty of reintegration after high-profile convictions
- The role of music as therapy and survival

In a moment when public debate again centers on enforcement, fear, and civil rights, this

documentary asks audiences to consider something deeper.

THE LONG ROAD BACK

When Shah was released in 2018, he had not touched an upright bass in 13 years. His fingers were stiff with arthritis. The jazz world he once knew had changed. His name now carried a stigma that made booking gigs difficult.

Yet he refused to quit.

The New York Times wrote of jazz bassist Tarik Shah that “rebuilding a career after 13 years behind bars on terrorism charges might make it near impossible.”

He secured a new instrument.

He studied again with a classical teacher.

He practiced methodically to rebuild his hands and technique.

Today, he performs regularly in New York City and the Capital Region. He leads weekly jam sessions in Troy. He teaches students. He supports himself through music once again.

Note by note, he rebuilt a life.

HOPE AT THE END OF A LONG TUNNEL

At a time when headlines focus on division and enforcement, this documentary offers something quieter — but powerful:

A story of art surviving incarceration.

A story of identity surviving stigma.

A story of hope after a very long, dark tunnel.

An inspiring story of resilience and rebirth

SCREENING INFORMATION

Beverly Hills Film Festival - Los Angeles, CA - <https://beverlyhillsfilmfestival.com/film/tarik-shah-dont-play-like-them/>

April 14, 1pm, TCL Chinese Theatre,

Social Justice Film Festival - Seattle, Washington -

<https://www.socialjusticefilmfestival.org/schedule>

April 18, 4pm

West Chester Film Festival - West Chester, PA - westchesterfilmfestival.com

Sunday, April 26 - 3:30pm - Uptown Performing Arts Center - 226 N. High St., West Chester, PA 19380

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