

# A DREAM FOR KABUL

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## THE FILM

Tokyo, September 2001. Haruhiro Shiratori, restaurateur, learns the worst: Atsushi, his only child, is dead. The ambitious son who left Japan to make his fortune in New York will never come back. On the morning of September 11, Atsushi was working on the 104th floor of one of the World Trade Center towers.

In the wake of this tragedy, many withdrew into their grief. Others talked of revenge. But Haruhiro Shiratori wanted to give meaning to his son's death. He decided to go to Afghanistan and try to prevent such attacks from happening again. This idealistic quest — one destined to encounter any number of obstacles — began with an unusual step: Haruhiro started to learn magic tricks.

With a flourish of the hand, he makes scarves disappear before the amazed eyes of onlookers, whether young or old, Afghan, Japanese or Americans. Magic becomes a secret weapon as this 21st century Don Quixote pursues his quest, negotiating his way around the language barrier.

In 2003, Shiratori travels to Afghanistan for the first time, accompanied by director Philippe Baylaucq, who will record Haruhiro's mission of peace for several years and across three continents. Shiratori's idea is to build a park in commemoration of his son on a hill overlooking Kabul. The plans are drawn up by one of Japan's greatest architects, Kishô Kurokawa, who graciously offers his services for free. They include areas where people can assemble, as well as a school, a water reservoir and a garden of 911 sakura, Japanese flowering cherry trees. In short, a place where the cultures of Japan and Afghanistan can meet.

To realize this dream in the heart of a battered city, Haruhiro Shiratori travels throughout Japan and the U.S., talking to school kids about his son's death and the deprivations of Afghan children. He remembers his own wartorn childhood: as a 4-year-old he witnessed the 1945 bombing of Tokyo. Looking at the children of Kabul, he sees himself, a child in a bombed-out city after the Japanese army was defeated. The memory still haunts him. We sense a need for reparation and redemption in his actions as he summons all his strength and moves forward. For the sake of the destitute child he was, and for his only son to whom he was a distant imperfect parent, Shiratori preaches, persuades and relentlessly fundraises.



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The film is skilfully cut, its subtlety mirroring the complexity of Shiratori's motives, as it follows him to his native Tokyo, where he fine-tunes his project and raises funds for construction; and then to New York, where he meets the friends of his lost, misunderstood son; and on to Kabul, the Afghan capital, where he encounters Kafkaesque administrative obstacles.

Each time he visits Kabul, he delights in meeting the same children again, but he also realizes there's a chasm between his dream and reality. The country is short of everything, prey to terrorist attacks and victim of a ragged bureaucracy. Shiratori's ambitious project requires infinite patience and unshakeable faith.

Yet Haruhiro Shiratori is determined. It's not just love for his lost son that drives him on but his hope for the future of humanity and harmony between nations. Are these the fanciful imaginings of an over-confident magician? Certainly, his quest is reminiscent of all Western interventions in Afghanistan, packed with good intentions and booby-trapped at every step of the way. But one thing is certain: the world needs magic more than ever, and Haruhiro Shiratori is fiercely determined to provide it.



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## THE DIRECTOR

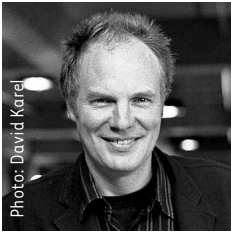


Photo: David Karel

PHILIPPE BAYLAUCQ

Born in 1958, Philippe Baylaucq studied sculpture and film at the Hornsey and St. Martin's schools of art in London. His early films, *Notre-Dame des Danses* (1981) and *Promise* (1981), show a pronounced taste for daring and experimentation. *Barcelone* (1985) cemented his position as an influential figure in art film.

Baylaucq's artist portraits include one on architect Phyllis Lambert (*Phyllis Lambert*, 1994) and a choreography of dancer Lucie Grégoire (*Les choses dernières*, 1994). *Lodola* (1996) is a magnificent allegory of

the origins of the world, celebrating the beauty and fragility of the human body. It won him 11 international awards.

His fascination with creative people continued with two very personal portraits of Quebec painters. He investigated Marcel Baril's imposing work in FIFA award-winning *Mystère B.* (1997). In 2000, the canvases of his artist grandfather, André Biéler, were the main source of inspiration for *Couleurs du sang*.

In 2001, Baylaucq made his first children's film, the musical tale *Hugo et le dragon*, which toured the world. Next he turned his attention to the legendary Sable Island, off the coast of Nova Scotia, with *Sables émouvants* (2003), selected in several festivals.

While making *A Dream for Kabul*, a shoot that lasted several years, Baylaucq coordinated the filmmaker collective that made *Un cri au bonheur* (2007), orchestrating the work and writing two of the 21 Quebec poems set to film by 11 directors. He is now working on a film on Reford Gardens near Grand-Métis, Quebec.

Baylaucq's dedication to film has earned him the Prix Lumières, which recognized his contribution to the advancement of directors' status in Quebec during his chairmanship of ARRQ (Association des réalisateurs et réalisatrices du Québec) from 1996 to 2000. He has chaired the Rencontres internationales du documentaire de Montréal since 2005.

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## THE PRODUCERS



Photo: Ian Quenneville

**NATHALIE BARTON**  
Producer

Nathalie Barton is cofounder and president of the InformAction production company and has specialized in producing POV documentaries for over twenty years. Her recent productions include *American Fugitive: The Truth about Hassan* by Jean-Daniel Lafond, *Lifelike* by Tally Abecassis (nominated for three Gemini Awards in 2006), *East End Kids* by Carole Laganière (Jutra and Gémeaux Award nominations in 2005), *The Magic Touch* by Carlos Ferrand (three Gémeaux in 2005), *De Mémoire de chats: les ruelles* by Manon Barbeau (two Gémeaux Awards in 2005), *The Messengers* by Helen Doyle (more than 15 international festivals), *Salam Iran, a Persian Letter* (Gémeaux award—best documentary, 2002), and *The Art of Time* by Philippe Baylaucq. She has also co-produced several one-off documentaries with France. From 1994 to 2002, Nathalie Barton was head of the APFTQ's documentary section and a member of the association's board of directors. She also serves on the board of directors of both Vues d'Afrique and Women in Film, Television and New Media (WIFTNM).

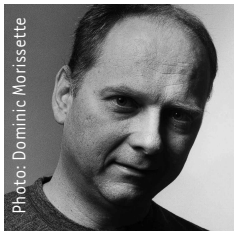


Photo: Dominic Morissette

**YVES BISAILLON**  
Producer and  
executive producer

Yves Bisailon was born in Montreal and holds a degree in Urban Planning from Université de Montréal and in Communications from Université du Québec à Montréal. After working in television as a journalist and director, notably for Radio-Canada, he joined the NFB as a producer in 1997. His work includes *Raymond Klibansky: From Philosophy to Life* (FIFA Award 2002), *Just Watch Me - Trudeau and the '70s Generation*, *La Cueca Sola* (best documentary at Hot Docs 2004), *The Cabinet of Doctor Ferron* (best cultural documentary at Gémeaux 2004) and *What Remains of Us* (selected at the International Critic's Week, Cannes 2004; Jutra for best documentary in 2005). His recent productions include *Who Shot My Brother?* (people's choice at FNC 2005), *Nadia's Journey* (Caméra au poing Award, RIDM 2006) and *Medicine Under the Influence* (best science and nature documentary, Gémeaux 2006).

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Photo: Michel La Veaux

## PATRICIA BERGERON

Producer

Holder of a bachelor's degree in communications (film) from the Université du Québec à Montréal, Patricia Bergeron has spent over 10 years amassing solid know-how in the field of new media in parallel to various film projects. After occasionally working for Radio-Canada radio as a scriptwriter and artistic director, she joined the National Film Board in April 2000.

By turns Web designer for the NFB's marketing division and marketing officer for the Animation Studio, in 2003 she was appointed producer of *Parole citoyenne*, the NFB's most important interactive Web platform. In 2006, she produced *La tête de l'emploi*, a series of five shorts with a link to a Web component on the topic of racism in the workplace. Today Patricia Bergeron is institutional producer (multiplatform) at the National Film Board of Canada's Quebec Studio.

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## CREDITS

### Produced with the financial participation of

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Japan Broadcasting Corporation  
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A Dream for Kabul  
A Film by **Philippe Baylaucq**

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