



presents

THE NETWORK



USA | 2013 | 97' | HD
A Film by Eva Orner

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World premiere at SXSW

SYNOPSIS

Unique, uplifting and heartbreaking, *The Network* is the story of Afghanistan's first independent television network – TOLO TV – and the family behind it.

In 2002, Kabul was emerging from five years of Taliban terror. It was a city in ruins cast back in time hundreds of years. Under the Taliban, all forms of media except the state-run radio station had been outlawed and public executions had become one of the few forms of entertainment.

With unprecedented access, Australian, LA based Academy and Emmy award winning filmmaker, Eva Orner, reveals the inspiring story of the Mohseni family - brothers Saad, Jahid, Zaid and sister Wajma - as they return to Afghanistan from Australia to help rebuild their country. They knew nothing about the media, but they know about running a successful business and are passionate about giving the Afghan people a voice that had been taken away from them for so long.

TOLO TV has grown to be Afghanistan's largest and most successful television networks employing over 800 Afghans producing news, current affairs, drama, comedy, music, and lifestyle programs. But as the country faces the impending withdrawal of foreign troops, and with security rapidly deteriorating, the team behind TOLO TV are set to face their biggest challenge yet.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

In 2011, I spent 3 months in Afghanistan making THE NETWORK, a film set behind the scenes at Tolo TV, Afghanistan's first and largest television station. I had read about Saad Mohseni for a few years and was intrigued. Saad and his family own and operate the largest media company in Afghanistan and he is often referred to as the Rupert Murdoch of Afghanistan. Under the Taliban there was no media and I was interested to find out what had been created in the decade following the foreign invasion. I am not a war correspondent and am not used to being in dangerous situations so 3 months in Afghanistan was a life changing experience for me.

What really drew me to this story was that it tells a very different narrative of Afghanistan from the one most of us are familiar with. It is not a story about war and the military but instead a film about the reconstruction of a country and the power of media. It is a story about how a handful of people can completely change a country. And it is the story of a group of brave, young, talented Afghans who just want a chance at life.

When I started working on this film I thought it would be a surprisingly positive story about a place and a war shrouded in negativity. And to some extent it is. However as the withdrawal of foreign troops rapidly approaches and violence and instability grow, the future for those at Tolo, and in Afghanistan, looks increasingly uncertain. THE NETWORK is a glimpse into modern Kabul through people working at a television station. It is a time capsule of what was, what is and what could have been.

2013

CAST AND PRODUCTION TEAM BIOS



Eva Orner - Director, Writer, Producer

Eva wrote, directed and produced *The Network*. After twelve years making documentaries, scripted feature films and television in Australia, Eva arrived in the US in 2004, ever the romantic, following her heart. While the love didn't last long, Eva quickly found success in her adopted home of New York and three and a half years after her arrival found herself onstage at the Kodak Theatre holding a little golden man. Eva moved to LA shortly after.

Eva's producing credits include the feature documentaries *Taxi To The Dark Side*, *Gonzo: The Life And Works Of Dr.*

Hunter S Thompson, *The Human Behavior Experiments* and *Herbie Hancock's Possibilities*. Her work has screened at festivals including Cannes, Sundance, Tribeca and Sydney, has been released theatrically and sold to television across the globe.

Eva has written, directed and produced a number of large industrials for the NRDC, the largest environmental lobby group in the world. She has worked with people as varied as Johnny Depp to Sheryl Crow to Graydon Carter.

Eva is fearless. In the passed two years she spent three months living in Afghanistan where she dodged bullets and suicide bombings, almost stepped on a landmine and had the time of her life. A few months prior to Afghanistan Eva broke her foot in Pristina, Kosovo. Eva has just returned from Beirut where she is shooting her latest feature documentary *Out of Iraq* about gay Iraqi refugees seeking asylum in the US. She is known for putting everyday people at ease in front of the camera and making them look beautiful. Eva is as comfortable working with everyday people as A list celebrities. Not a lot fazes Eva. She is simply obsessed with great stories and finding them an audience.

Hani Farsi - Executive Producer

Hani Farsi was educated at American University in Washington DC, graduating with a B.A and Masters in International Studies. From 1993 until 2000 he sat on the board of London's acclaimed Donmar Warehouse Theatre, personally subsidizing this landmark venue and saving it from closure until state funding was allocated. At the Donmar he worked closely with academy Award Winner Sam Mendes CBE, who was appointed as the Artistic Director of the theatre in 1992. Together with Mendes, Farsi also developed the "Donmar in the West End" franchise, reviving classic pieces of work by, among others Tom Stoppard and Anthony Shaffer. Farsi was also active in supporting the work of playwright and screenwriter Patrick Marber, funding the move of Marber's play "Closer" when it moved from the National Theatre to the West End.

In 2007 Farsi established Corniche Pictures which specializes in funding, producing and distributing independent features. In the summer of 2008, Corniche took a significant stake in Le Pacte, the French distribution company established in '07 by respected French distributor Jean Labadie. As well as distributing a dozen films a year in Europe, Le Pacte and Corniche are developing Video, Television and International Sales. This new company has already achieved considerable success and acquired a reputation for selecting challenging work by leading directors from around the world. Le Pacte's most significant release of 2008 was Ari Folman's "Waltz with Bashir" and "Gomorra", the film of Roberto Saviano's controversial book about organized crime in Naples. Gomorra won the Grand Prix du Jury while Waltz with Bashir has been nominated for an Oscar and a Bafta, won the Golden Globe for Best Foreign Language Film, and won the Directors Guild of America Award for a documentary.

In 2009 Corniche and Le Pacte entered three films into the Cannes Film Festival with "The Time that Remains" by Elia Suleiman with Farsi as Executive Producer. In 2011 Le Pacte had two films in the Official Selection of the 64th Festival de Cannes and another four in other competitions. In official selection was "Habemus Papam" by 2001 Palme d'Or winner Nanni Moretti, and "Drive" by Nicolas Winding Refn which won him Best Director.

2012 marks an important year for the Production arm of Corniche Pictures with three ground-breaking films released in festival season. "The Patience Stone" is adapted from the best-selling novel by Atiq Rahimi, translated in 33 languages and winner of the most prestigious book award in France (Goncourt Prize) in 2008. "The Network" by Oscar winning director Eva Orner is a documentary set behind the scenes of a fledgling television network in one of the most unstable and dangerous places on Earth. Mira Nair's adaptation of Mohsin Hamid's "The Reluctant Fundamentalist" was developed with Corniche Pictures and is set for a late 2012/early 2012 release, starring Liev Schreiber, Riz Ahmed, Kate Hudson and Kiefer Sutherland.

Corniche Pictures enjoys a close working relationship with various International Film Institutions including but not limited to the BFI whom Farsi has personally backed their "Rescue the Hitchcock 9" the major campaign to restore all nine surviving silent films by one of the greatest directors of all time, Alfred Hitchcock.

In the summer of 2011 Farsi joined with other prominent members of the film and business community by being appointed a seat on the BFI International Development Council. Farsi and the council will work alongside the Board of Governors to increase the global reach of the Institute's projects.

Abazar Khayami – Director of Photography, Co-Producer, Location Sound Recordist

Brought up in Washington DC and currently residing in New York City, Abazar's multi-disciplinary work encompasses film, video, photography and installations. With a passion for documentaries and concise visual storytelling his images exist in a setting which is both

narrative and starkly visual + his style continues to take new shape with every project he does. His work has been featured in Flaunt Magazine, Hypebeast, Vice, and at the Cannes Film Festival.

Luis Lopez – Editor, Co-Producer

Luis Lopez is a filmmaker from Tijuana, Mexico. Luis studied film at the University of Southern California's School of Cinema. His documentary film credits include *Chevolution* (director, writer, editor), *Getting Up: The Tempt One Story* (editor), *La Maleta Mexicana* (writer, editor), *Freakonomics* (writer, editor, graphics), *King of Kong: A Fistful of Quarters* (associate producer, co-editor, cinematographer), *Make Believe* (co-producer, co-editor), *Shut Up & Sing* (producer, camera), *Punk Like Me* (associate producer, camera), and *Dixie Chicks: Top of the World* (producer, director, editor).

Darrin Roberts – Co-Editor, Co-Producer

Darrin Roberts is an editor based in Los Angeles. He works equally on documentaries and feature narrative films. Born in South Laguna Beach, California, he graduated from USC's School of Cinema Television (now School of Cinematic Arts) where he met Luis Lopez. Later he would join Luis on tour with country superstars The Dixie Chicks, shooting what would become the documentary *Shut Up And Sing* with Barbara Kopple. Other work with USC alums includes Richard Kelly's *Southland Tales* and *The Box* as well as the documentary *Bigger, Stronger, Faster: the Side Effects of Being American* by Christopher Bell. He continues to work closely with Luis. This is his first film with Producer/Director Eva Orner.

Mark Rivett - Composer

Mark is an Australian composer/arranger living in Los Angeles California. In a stellar 25 year career he and his company Song Zu have risen to become one of the most respected and awarded studios in the world. They specialize in music and sound design for advertising, television and film.

Song Zu has state of the art studios in Sydney and Singapore and their business model centers around a varied composer and sound designer base under strong creative and musical directorship. They have written and produced music for Australian TV shows such as *Water Rats*, *Murder Call* and *Australia's Next Top Model*, the HBO documentary *Schappelle Corby*, *The Hidden Truth*, the score for the award winning Australian feature film *Men's Group* and supplied music editing, and music programming for Baz Luhrmann's *Australia*, and co-produced the soundtrack album.

Mark has always been committed to the nurturing of musical talent and to making Song Zu a unique home for composers and sound designers. The Song Zu crew have won many international awards in Advertising, Television and Film and thus Mark is often called upon to judge many of these awards.

Mark is currently busy working on the music for a variety of feature documentary film projects.

CAST MEMBERS:

Saad Mohseni



Saad Mohseni is the Chairman and CEO of MOBY Group. Established in 2002 by Saad, Zaid, Jahid and Wajma Mohseni, MOBY Group is a diversified media entity in South and Central Asia and the Middle East.

The company has spearheaded significant changes in the media landscape and continues to drive and develop products that engage, educate, and entertain audiences. MOBY Group employs over 900 staff across 13 integrated businesses including radio and TV stations, print media, digital, creative agencies, technology solutions, and strategic partnerships. Currently, it specializes in reaching millions of Dari, Farsi, Pashto and English speaking people across the region as well as other substantial populations and language groups across the Middle East and in South Asia.

MOBY is the world's most prolific producer of Pashto and Dari (Farsi) content, including dramas, reality television, game shows, sitcoms, as well as political programming. Its hard-hitting current affairs news shows, locally produced dramas and documentaries have received accolades and recognition in the international arena, including two awards at the 2010 Sundance Festival for its moving documentary "Afghan Star", and a Seoul Drama Award for 'Eagle 4'.

In 2005, Reporters Without Borders recognized MOBY's Afghan channel, Tolo TV, for its ongoing battle for the right to inform the public. The channel, along with Tolo News – launched in 2010 – has aided in rooting out corruption, empowering civil society, and serving the Afghan people as they seek transparency and accountability from their government.

Saad has an extensive background in investment banking, equities, and financial markets in Australia and Europe. Prior to establishing MOBY Group, Saad headed the Equities and Corporate Finance Division at one of Australia's leading investment banks. He was born in the

United Kingdom as one of four children of an Afghan diplomat. He spent his early years in London, Kabul, Islamabad and Tokyo before emigrating to Melbourne, Australia.

Zaid Mohseni

Zaid Mohseni is an Australian national, of Afghan descent. He grew up in Melbourne, after his family left Afghanistan in the late seventies. A lawyer by trade, Mohseni graduated from Monash University, where he studied Economics and Law, in 1992. In 1993, he joined Wilmoth Field Warne, a Melbourne-based, boutique law firm, where he was eventually promoted to Partner and stayed for 12 years. A visit to Afghanistan with his siblings, in early 2002, led to the establishment of the family business, MOBY Group, which evolved to employ the full time participation of Mohseni's brothers, Saad and Jahid and his sister Wajma. In 2004, Zaid resigned his position with Wilmoth Filed Warne and relocated to Afghanistan, where he too joined MOBY Group in a full-time role.

The [MOBY Group](#) has evolved over the last nine years into Afghanistan's largest media company with interests in television, radio, print, production, online news services, directories, IT&T, and retail. It currently employs over 1,000 staff. In 2008, MOBY Group and News Corporation established Broadcast Middle East* ("BME") as a 50/50 joint venture. Zaid was appointed as BME's CEO and the company's flagship product, FARS1, was launched on 1 August 2009, as the first general entertainment satellite channel in fully dubbed (not subtitled) Farsi language. FARS1 is now wholly owned by MOBY Group. In 2012, Zaid assumed leadership of Afghanistan operations as well as Group COO.

Jahid Mohseni

Jahid Mohseni is a co-Founder of the Moby Group, an organisation which has driven the nascence of Afghanistan's contemporary media industry. The award winning and multi faceted Moby Group dominates audience share across traditional and and new media in Afghanistan, and continues to expand regionally with the recent launch of Farsi1, targeting the Farsi speaking audiences across Iran, Tajikistan and the Gulf.

Prior to Moby Group, Jahid held senior positions in Government, including head of the Afghan Government's Afghan Assistance Co-ordination Authority (AACCA). AACCA was the main coordination body dealing with donor assistance to Afghanistan and oversaw the nation's first Development Forum, as well as the National Development Budgets. He also served as Secretariat of the Cabinet's Economic Coordination Committee, chaired by the President, and was an advisor to the Minister of Agriculture.

Jahid was born in Afghanistan, and is one of four children of an Afghan diplomat. He spent much of his early childhood in Japan, and later immigrated to Australia, where he completed his

secondary and tertiary education. He holds a Bachelor of Commerce and Master of Business Administration, and is fluent in Dari, English and conversational Japanese.

Wajma Mohseni

Wajma Mohseni is a Director at MOBY Group and has over 14 years experience in marketing to consumers and businesses in the media, directories and telecommunications sectors. In Afghanistan, Wajma lead the brand launch, development and extension of TOLO TV, ARMAN FM and LEMAR TV brands and created communication campaigns for a range of corporate, government and military clients. She has a degree in Business (Marketing) and is currently studying at NYU's Interactive Telecommunications Program (ITP).