

HOLLYWOODGATE

Directed by Ibrahim Nash'at
Produced by Talal Derki, Odessa Rae, and Shane Boris



Run Time: 91 minutes / In Pashto, Dari, English / Germany, USA

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SHORT SYNOPSIS

Unprecedented and audacious, HOLLYWOODGATE is the riveting result of the year director Ibrahim Nash'at spent with the Taliban in the wake of the United States withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021. Risking his life in the war-torn nation, Nash'at is on the ground with the Taliban when they enter an American base loaded with a portion of the roughly \$7 billion worth of U.S. armaments left behind. Driving towards an astonishing and chilling end, Nash'at tracks Taliban leaders as they attempt to transform from a fundamentalist militia into a modern military regime, employing Hollywood-style propaganda to achieve their goals.

SYNOPSIS

HOLLYWOODGATE picks up where the rest of the world left off, in the immediate aftermath of the United States' chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan in August of 2021. Days after the last U.S. plane leaves Afghan soil, the Taliban—now in control of the country—enter an American base in Kabul called Hollywood Gate, reputed to have been a secret CIA station. There they find a portion of the over \$7 billion in sophisticated American weaponry left in the country: numerous small arms and munitions, jet fighters, Black Hawk helicopters, and other military equipment. Much of it is damaged, but the base is also equipped with many of the parts needed to fix it.

Director Ibrahim Nash'at's unprecedented and audacious HOLLYWOODGATE is witness as the new head of Afghanistan's air force, Mawlawi Mansour—a Taliban whose father was killed by the Americans—orders his soldiers to inventory everything and repair all they can. The men go to work restoring the weaponry and training themselves to use it. Among them is Muhktar—a former Taliban fighter now aiming to build a high-ranking military career—who dreams of avenging the war.

HOLLYWOODGATE follows Mawlawi Mansour and Mukhtar over the course of a year as the Taliban transform from a fundamentalist militia into a heavily armed military

regime preparing for war beyond Afghanistan's borders. Nash'at, an Egyptian journalist granted unique but fraught access to Afghanistan, documents what the Taliban will allow him to see, capturing deeply revealing moments that cut to the core of the group's identity. At a moment in history when propaganda and authoritarianism are on the rise across the globe—and when the Taliban themselves are turning to Hollywood-style propaganda as a means to legitimize themselves—HOLLYWOODGATE offers viewers a chilling and essential portrait of what is happening inside Afghanistan today.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I grew up in Cairo, Egypt and from a young age I was exposed to many who portrayed the Taliban as heroes. In my adolescence I began to question this belief and that questioning led me to a career in journalism. Since then, I have worked across the Middle East and Europe with Deutsche Welle, Al Jazeera, Voice of America, and others, filming world leaders and those in positions of power. Most of these people were men and most wanted nothing more from me other than to be a mouthpiece for their perspective and an amplifier of their message.

When the Taliban came to power (again), I was stunned. How could this happen? And what would now happen to the people of Afghanistan? It haunted me. Because of my background filming world leaders, I wondered if I could gain access to the Taliban. If so, this time I pledged that I would work independently: I would show the world what the Taliban wanted me to see and also, more importantly, what I saw.

In the style of a Shakespearean drama with power at its main axis, HOLLYWOODGATE follows soldiers who become generals and generals who become totalitarians. In places where a camera has never been permitted, I use an intimate, observant eye to see the lives of our two characters without a running voiceover or set-up interviews. My goal is that we can see through the ways they present themselves and understand the truth of their ambitions for control—of women, of their countrymen, of their larger geo-political region. The film's other main character, Hollywood Gate, functions like a Greek theater where the failure of the U.S.-led occupation of Afghanistan is played out and the stratagems of the Taliban's brutal regime over the Afghan people are staged.

I am grateful to be supported by a team of creative collaborators who have made films I deeply admire such as NAVALNY, OF FATHERS AND SONS, THE EDGE OF DEMOCRACY, FIRE OF LOVE, and HONEYLAND. My hope is that for the first time HOLLYWOODGATE can expose the Taliban from the inside out and help return attention to the plight of the Afghan people.

MAJOR HISTORICAL DATES IN AFGHANISTAN'S MODERN HISTORY

1919: King Amanullah Khan declares independence from the British Empire.

1920: The first school for girls is founded, Masturat School.

1922: The first women's magazine, Irshad-e Naswan, is founded. It promotes equal rights and educational and professional reforms for women.

1929: King Amanullah Khan is ousted by an Islamist reactionary rebellion supported by the British. He is replaced by the pro-British Nadir Khan, who reverses all progressive reforms.

1965: The first female candidates are elected as members of the Afghan Parliament.

1973: The monarchy is abolished. The Republic of Afghanistan is established by Daoud Khan.

1960s and 1970s: During the Cold War, the Afghan government receives major funding from both the United States and the Soviet Union for development projects; these include the Helmand Valley Project funded by USAID and the Salang Tunnel built by the Soviet Union.

1979: President Taraki is assassinated. Destabilization in the country leads to an invasion by the Soviet Union.

1979 to 1989: The U.S. and its regional allies support Islamist insurgency groups fighting the Soviets, among them Al-Qaeda and the Taliban; the U.S. provides these groups with modern weaponry and financial resources. The "Arab Afghans," as these men come to be known, are recruited from different Middle Eastern countries with the support of Western intelligence agencies. Osama Bin Laden and his fighters receive American and Saudi funding.

1989: The last Soviet soldiers leave Afghanistan.

1989 to 1992: President Najibullah intensifies the peace process of National Reconciliation. The effort fails when a coup d'état by a rival faction ousts Najibullah and hands the government to Islamist insurgents.

1992 to 1996: Power struggles among rival insurgency groups lead to civil war.

1996 to 2001: The Taliban comes to power and establishes The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. Entertainment and recreational activities are banned and public floggings and executions are held in stadiums. The brutal repression of women is widespread. Bin Laden forges a close relationship with the Taliban and moves Al-Qaeda headquarters and about a dozen training camps to Afghanistan.

October, 2001: After the 9/11 attacks in the U.S., the Taliban offers to extradite Osama bin Laden to a third country, a non-U.S. ally. President Bush rejects the offer. The U.S. invades Afghanistan.

December, 2001: The International Conference on Afghanistan in Bonn, Germany

excludes Taliban delegates from negotiations and appoints Hamid Karzai as the new head of state of an interim authority.

2004: Hamid Karzai wins presidential elections. His presidency faces pervasive allegations of election fraud, corruption, and nepotism.

2014: Widespread accusations of fraud delay the results of the presidential election. John Kerry, then-U.S. Secretary of State, mediates between the two final candidates, Ghani and Abdullah, leading to a National Unity Government.

August 15, 2021: The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan falls to the Taliban.

August 30, 2021: The last American soldiers leave Afghanistan. In the twenty years since its invasion, the U.S. has spent \$300 million dollars per day on the war, every day, for two decades. The war has killed an estimated 167,000 Afghans and 6,500 Americans.

August, September 2021: As the Taliban takes control of Afghanistan, sanctions are imposed, cutting off foreign aid that had covered an estimated 75 percent of Afghanistan's government expenditures and accounted for 40 percent of its GDP

September, 2021: The Taliban establishes its new government, the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. The government bans girls from receiving secondary education, suspends Afghanistan's 2004 Constitution and imposes their extreme understanding of Sharia law.

February, 2022: Foreign aid is dramatically reduced and the United Nations warns of a humanitarian crisis unfolding, with more than 22 million Afghans threatened by starvation. Over one million Afghans have left the country.

November, 2022: The Taliban ban women from entering public parks.

December, 2022: The Taliban ban women from receiving a university education.

December, 2022: The Taliban resume public executions.

January, 2023: A staggering 28.3 million people (two-thirds of Afghanistan's population) is in need of urgent humanitarian assistance to survive.

January, 2023: The United Nations warns that the collapse of Afghanistan's legal system is a "human rights catastrophe."

August, 2023: The Taliban and the U.S. hold their first official talks since the Taliban takeover. These talks remain ongoing.

September, 2023: The Taliban welcome China's new ambassador to Afghanistan. Other countries with a diplomatic presence inside Afghanistan include Russia, Iran and Pakistan.

March, 2024: The Taliban announce they will resume public flogging and stoning to death of women for adultery.

March, 2024: ISIS-K, an affiliate of the Islamic State and enemy of the Taliban, attacks a concert hall in Moscow, killing at least 137 people. The attack is believed to be motivated in part by Russia's recognition of the Taliban government.

March, 2024: Human Rights Watch estimates that 69 percent of Afghanistan's population still does not have enough food. Women, burdened by multiple restrictions on their freedom, are suffering the most.

**INTERVIEW WITH
IBRAHIM NASH'AT (DIRECTOR/CO-PRODUCER/CINEMATOGRAPHER) AND
TALAL DERKI (PRODUCER)**

Q: How did you get access to film the Taliban?

IBRAHIM NASH'AT: I spent a decade as a journalist filming world leaders. I learned that the best way to approach leaders is by working with the fixers who are closest to them. Our executive producer, Elbanna, who is Lebanese, helped me find a way to reach a fixer who secured a meeting with one of the leaders of the Taliban.

To gain the trust of the leadership, I asked the fixer to put me in contact with a translator who could accompany me 24/7 who was a member of the group. After I arranged everything and prepared myself to go to Kabul, the fixer stopped answering my calls two days before my flight. I had already invested a lot of money and time, so I decided to go no matter what.

After I arrived in Kabul, I tried many times to reach the fixer and he never answered me nor answered the translator who was working with me. The translator and I tried to reach the leaders ourselves, but we were never allowed to meet anyone. Days were passing by and my money started to run out.

I had been paying the translator and the assistant money every day without filming anything. The moment I decided this would never work, I told the translator I would leave the country. He said, "But you already are here and you have paid a lot of money. Why don't you just film with some younger Talibs for a little before you go?" He told me, "My cousin just got relocated to the airport. Come with me to film him and see how things go from there." The moment I arrived at the airport, I realized that he meant the military airport, and the moment we entered the compound and they closed the door behind us and I saw the word "Hollywood Gate," I knew this was the story I was being prepared for. I was introduced to Mukhtar who loved the idea of filming, and I knew that filming him would at least allow me to film inside the walls of Hollywood Gate.

He said, "To film with me, you need the permission of my Amir, meaning my leader," so I met with his Amir and after a tiring interrogation, the Amir said, "You can film but you need the permission of *my* Amir," and the ladder kept getting higher until it led me to Mawlawi Mansour, who had just been appointed as the Head of the Air Forces. He directly accepted my request to film Mukhtar, so I asked to film with him too and he agreed.

But that was just the beginning. The question isn't only, "How did you get access to film the Taliban?" it's also, "How did you *keep* access?" because from that moment on, I realized that I had become Sisyphus and my rock was the access. I had to keep pushing it up just to have it fall on me, and then I would need to start again. Nothing about the access was secure—it was being taken away every other day, and I had to deal with many of those who wanted to prove themselves endlessly powerful. The day I decided to leave the country, I had to let go of that rock.

TALAL DERKI: Ibrahim and I share the same point of view about fanatic military groups. This is how we got to be friends and artistically decided to work together. And when the Taliban took power and we saw those two, let's say, survivors who fell down from the airplane, the last airplane leaving Afghanistan the day the Taliban was taking power, we were shocked. We felt really bad that this country was now facing the Taliban and this nightmare could stay forever. And Ibrahim said, "I want to go there and film. What's the future of this country? What is making people flee in this way of madness?"

I told him, "You have two strong elements to find your subject: One, is that you have a strong religious background. Second, your journalistic background. I could have said 'Impossible,' but in filmmaking there is no impossible. Let's try to gain trust, because psychologically I know these leaders—when they win, they like fame, they like people to capture them with the camera. And this is the time when they can say yes." Ibrahim knocked on all the doors. He tried, he waited, and he found his way.

IBRAHIM: Though I thought that my background was what would ensure my access, their exaggerated interest in the work I did filming world leaders made me realize that what they saw in me was someone who could feed their internal image of themselves as people of power.

Q: Ibrahim, how did your upbringing in a religious family influence who you are today?

IBRAHIM: Growing up in a conservative society, at a young age I was exposed to a number of radicals who were always trying to impose their ideology on me and never allowed me to ask questions. Their pressure on me, and on all the others around me, made me rebel and stop being part of that community. In my teenage years, I started to realize the opportunistic nature of those radicals who seek power and who use the peaceful nature of the ones around them to serve their own agendas. They would spread their toxic masculinity, brutal and violent behaviors, and convince the people they are speaking the words of God to remain in power. In an economically and politically collapsed society, religion has unfortunately become the strongest tool for these radicals to control the nations.

Q: Was it your first time in Afghanistan? And, having witnessed the fall of Kabul through the mass media, what was your feeling when you arrived in the country?

IBRAHIM: It was my first time in Afghanistan. It felt post-apocalyptic, weird and sad. The Taliban were euphoric, and you could feel their internal, power-loving monster being unleashed. I quickly became silent and began observing. When it got hard, I would remember what Talal told me: “Focus on the image in your monitor, and every scene you believe could be part of your film. The emotions you’re suppressing will later be released, but the film will last forever. Cinema always wins.”

TALAL: We both come from Arab Muslim countries that the West entered in the name of bringing liberty or democracy and it ended up in a terrible way. In my country Syria, the weapons went into bad hands. In Iraq, in Libya, in Afghanistan, and in Yemen. So this film raises the question about this interference. The West helped the Taliban—not directly, but at the end of the day, all that technology makes the Taliban stronger. At the end of the day, we, as the moderate Muslims, bear the cost and get the damage. And as you see, it’s terrible.

We wanted to capture the transition of the Taliban from an extremist militia into a military regime. We don't want to make a decision. We let the audience watch and be the judges, not us.

Q: Ibrahim, what was it like when you first went into the Hollywood Gate complex—walking into this very American microcosm with the Taliban and seeing what was there?

IBRAHIM: I entered a multi-layered universe where the cultures clash. I knew from the moment I entered this is where our film should be. I felt like Alice in Wonderland, seeing American shampoos and basketballs. Having both Mukhtar and Mawlawi Mansour agree to be filmed secured the location, which serves as a Greek theater. Even if the characters stopped filming with me, the story of the place would continue.

The story began very simply, as I thought that the Taliban would find and fix a couple of rifles. But the weapons got bigger and bigger, and the story became how they found the weapons, fixed the weapons, and how they would threaten to use them.

We found that storyline during the process of pre-editing the film during my few visits to Berlin, and it was easy to follow, since I was focused on how normal Taliban deal with weapons and carry them everywhere, and how having military aircrafts would for them represent the pinnacle of power. For someone like Mawlawi Mansour, whose father was killed by a bomb dropped from an aircraft, he would show me his weapon as a way of imagining himself in a replica of a Hollywood war film. He sought to use cinema as a means of propaganda.

Q: How effective will this arsenal be? Did you have a sense they have enough to keep this going for years?

IBRAHIM: I don't know. They have a great number of functional weapons. They may use them to suppress the Afghan people, they may use them to invade neighboring countries, they may sell them, or they may even use them against the West. But then again, this is also what they want the world to think.

Q: Ibrahim, even if it's not in the film, did you have any opportunity to spend time with non-Talibani, the sort of Afghans who now find themselves living under this regime?

IBRAHIM: Unfortunately, I barely had connections with normal citizens, except when you buy something from a shop or things like that. I was under constant surveillance by the Taliban, and I had no chance of being alone. And when I met normal Afghans, unfortunately they gave me a really horrible look, because they thought I'm a Taliban too.

Q: What other obstacles did you encounter?

IBRAHIM: Every day there was a challenge psychologically to keep going—having to get rid of any emotions or needs as a human being, accepting the fact that you are now part of this community and you need to live the way they live. It was constant suppression of myself.

I was never lying to them, I was never telling them, “Hey, I'm going to make you look like heroes.” I was always saying, “I will film what I see. That's my promise to you, I'm not going to interfere with what I see, I'm just going to transfer the reality as I see it.”

You see so many harsh cuts, which was a brilliant decision by our editors, Atanas Georgiev and Marion Tuor, to make the viewer observe with me.

Q: Can you talk about your relationship with each other? How did you meet?

IBRAHIM: When I moved to Berlin in 2018, Talal's film *Of Fathers and Sons* was everywhere. After the Oscars, there was a screening in Berlin and I went. The movie destroyed me. With the conservative society that I grew up in, I could definitely see myself in the son. I was watching the Q&A of Talal afterwards and said to myself, “I'll definitely try to meet this man.” I tried so many ways. And it never worked until he was doing his film *Under the Sky of Damascus*. I sent him an email saying, “I'm willing to work for free just to get to meet you.” It took some time and then he said, “I will test you for ten days” and we began a long editing process together for two years.

This was the beginning of a very strong collaboration, and friendship. We spent a lot of time and got to know each other properly. I would call Talal like my older brother, who

deeply shows how much he cares for me in so many different ways. It's crazy how our friendship was built.

TALAL: I wanted to support him and save him from the mistakes I had to face. He would call me from Afghanistan and I would discuss with him in a very careful, coded way so he had someone to talk to. We knew that his life would be endangered if the Taliban knew about our partnership as I'm considered by these radical groups as someone who infiltrated Al-Qaeda in Syria. When he would come back to Berlin and we would watch the material—and I remember this feeling from my own experience—he would say, “I wish this is the last trip. I don't want to see them again. I cannot handle them again. I don't want to go back.” I said, “Of course, yeah. It's fine, it's fine, don't go back.” I knew I had to tell him that because that is what someone wants to hear when they are just coming back from hell—they want to hear that they don't have to go back. I knew that he would decide, “No, I have to continue.”

I remember once when I returned from filming, I said to someone from my producing team that I didn't want to go back and he said, “No, you have to go. You have to continue,” and it traumatized me. So I would say to Ibrahim, “Everything is under control, you should not be worried. If you don't want to go, we can always find the solution to make the film work.” Many of the things Ibrahim saw in Afghanistan broke his heart and it was very difficult for him to keep filming.

Q: Given all that you've both witnessed, where do you see the situation in Afghanistan going?

IBRAHIM: The future of Afghanistan, if the situation remains as is, is just horrible for women, kids and for everyone there. Half of the nation is being banned from education, and there is an ongoing apartheid against women. The poverty is beyond imagination and it is the people paying the price of the sanctions and not the Taliban.

The scandal of HOLLYWOODGATE is that the Taliban is learning from Hollywood, and attempting to make their own propaganda, to present themselves as heroes and world leaders like any other. Now that the twenty-year war is over, the propaganda war becomes increasingly important.

Q: When you think of the film, what moment within it really stays with you?

IBRAHIM: The scene in which Mukhtar comments on the new law forcing women to wear a face mask on TV by saying, “I hope that our new law is not contradicting Sharia Law,” which clearly showed that he had no idea what Sharia law is. To me this so clearly shows the Taliban's toxic masculinity and quest for gender apartheid—as well as their

ignorance about what they preach, which extends to leaders of much higher religious and military rank as well.

TALAL: There is a moment at the military parade that will stay in my mind for a long, long time—the way Mawlawi slapped his own soldiers, real Taliban fighters, and then a few hours later they kiss his hand, the same hand that slapped them. For me, those two moments tell a lot about the Taliban and how they control. He was so happy when the soldiers kissed his hand. So he thinks that he needs to slap more faces so his hand will get more kisses.

Q: What do you hope the impact of this film will be?

IBRAHIM: I hope the film shows the failure of the twenty-year war in Afghanistan. I hope it shows the repressive, power-hungry nature of the Taliban regime and the other leaders who would force their nations into war for their own benefits of keeping power, regardless of their nation, religion, or ethnic group. I hope it shows that propaganda has always been a tool of war and one that the Taliban are trying to use now as well. I hope that this film shows the brutality of war and the pain that it causes for generations. I know this might be idealistic to say, but my experience is that war, even if just, would still cause suffering for generations and yield a traumatized nation. In the end, only warlords benefit from war. War begets war begets war.

TALAL: I hope this film will be watched and talked about for years and years. This is the role of the cinema: eternity. Ibrahim managed to capture something extraordinary and he risked his life. And at the same time we are trying to bring it in the best cinematic way.

A lot of talented people worked very hard on this film. The documentary film market is flooded now and it's not easy to compete if you don't make something impressive. So my experience with Ibrahim, with Odessa [Rae] and Shane [Boris]—I learned a lot from them about making documentaries and I'm really thankful for this opportunity.

IBRAHIM: The creative team was amazing. It was Talal and me in the beginning and then Odessa joining us, Shane joining us and Marion [Tuor] was with us and then Atanas [Georgiev] joined us. We were all devoted to the same goal. Then Shane and Odessa won the Oscar for *Navalny* and this also really helped us bring *HOLLYWOODGATE* to a different level. It was truly collaborative. We all made this film together.

And what's different in this project than any other project that I've worked on in my life is that all of us are part of each other's lives, not just part of each other's filmmaking process. There's a lot of emotional support—when one of us is down, the others are bringing them up. We all became a big part of each other's family. Most of us were refusing to open up in the beginning, but somehow the cause of what we work on, and what we want to deliver, has gotten us all to where we are.

Q: Ibrahim, your point that propaganda has always been a tool of war—can you speak to that in the context of conflicts in the world right now?

IBRAHIM: Propaganda is a weapon to create more and more division and hatred. The war in Gaza, the war in Ukraine—we are seeing propaganda being used everywhere to create and sustain conflict, to further the idea of good guys and bad guys, to further the idea that one side is right and deserves to win and the other side is evil and deserves to lose or be destroyed. The division and hatred that propaganda sow leads only to more war and more war and more war.

Q: In addition to the pervasiveness of propaganda in the world today, there is the pervasiveness of the actual weaponry of war, as HOLLYWOODGATE illustrates.

IBRAHIM: Yes, weapons too now are everywhere. And the issue is, what will happen with all of those weapons? Whose hands will they wind up in? As Talal said earlier, they always fall into the wrong hands, the hands of people who will use them to control others and try to take more power for themselves. We saw this in Syria when the weapons went to ISIS, we saw it in Afghanistan after the Soviets left when the weapons fueled a civil war and helped establish the Taliban in the first place. And now we see it with the Taliban gaining billions of dollars of high-powered American weapons. There have been reports of some of those weapons showing up in Pakistan, and in Kashmir. There's so much propaganda and disinformation, it's impossible to know for sure what's true. But we do know that the weapons are tools of control, of a fascism that just keeps growing.

Q: What do you expect the Taliban reaction to the film will be?

IBRAHIM: I always try to act with integrity. I told them that I would show what I saw and this is what I tried to do with every fiber of my being. All I can control is what I do.

TALAL: From my experience with other extremist Muslim groups, their reaction will be to just ignore the film. If anyone asks them about the film, they'll say, "We haven't seen it."

Q: Ibrahim, do you worry for your own safety?

IBRAHIM: The day I'm supposed to die, I'll die. But having said that, we are taking all the measures we need to be taking to make sure that we are safe. And also we have no connection to them anymore.

Q: Any last words?

IBRAHIM: The place itself, Hollywood Gate, is a metaphor. It's only a very small part of what's happening in Afghanistan. And even within it, you can see a lot of traumas. But what you don't see in the film is the reality of the daily suffering of Afghans, suffering that has been going on for so long and that will continue until who knows when. What do we do about that? That for me is the most important question.

In the larger context of the world, I wish that governments and nations could find a way to not just be reactive when issues arise, to not just fight. How do we find a way forward that is not always to simply react and go to war?

FILMMAKER BIOGRAPHIES

Ibrahim Nash'at (Director/Co-Producer/Cinematographer) (born June 17, 1990 in Jeddah) is a multi-award-winning Egyptian documentary filmmaker based in Berlin, Germany. In his career in journalism, he has worked with several international channels and online platforms such as Deutsche Welle, Al Jazeera, Business Insider, AJ+, Voice of America, and others. Ibrahim holds a master's degree in documentary filmmaking from Met Film School and a BS in Pharmaceutical Science from Misr International University. He co-edited Talal Derki's latest film "Under the Sky of Damascus," which premiered at Panorama - Berlinale 2023 and won the Golden Alexander at the 25th Thessaloniki Documentary Festival. Ibrahim has directed multiple short films that have been selected for various film festivals around the world. "Hollywoodgate" is Ibrahim's first feature film, which premiered at the Venice Film Festival and Telluride Film Festival 2023. The film has participated in over 50 film festivals and received 13 awards.

Talal Derki (Producer) is a Syrian director and producer based in Berlin, Germany. His film OF FATHERS AND SONS, which he co-produced/directed, was nominated for an Academy Award in 2019 and won the Germany academy award LOLA. Derki's short films and feature-length documentaries have received many awards at a variety of festivals, including the Grand Jury Award at the Sundance Film Festival in 2014 for RETURN TO HOMS and again in 2018 for OF FATHERS AND SONS. Talal has produced multiple award-winning short documentaries including ODE TO LESVOS and

PEOPLE OF THE WASTELAND. His most recent film as director and producer is UNDER THE SKY OF DAMASCUS, which premiered at Panorama - Berlinale 2023 and won the Golden Alexander at the 25th Thessaloniki Doc Festival. Talal is a member of the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences.

Odessa Rae (Producer) is an Academy Award- and BAFTA-winning producer who was key in the formation of Ivanhoe Pictures, which produced the box office hit CRAZY RICH ASIANS. Since finishing her multi-year First-Look deal at Ivanhoe Pictures in early 2019, Rae has been producing independently. Rae has become widely known for producing the Academy Award-winning documentary, NAVALNY (CNN Films/Warner Bros.), which premiered at Sundance (2022), winning “Best of Fest” and “Audience Award”. Odessa’s films have been shown at festivals around the world and have received multiple honors including PGA, Dupont, Greirson, Cinema Eye and Critics’ Choice awards. Odessa is the recipient of the 2023 UN Sustainable Goals Impact Through Film award.

Shane Boris (Producer) is an Academy Award-winning and two-time Academy Award-nominated producer and writer working on films that push the boundaries of conventional form in order to tell timeless and cinematic stories. His films have played at festivals around the world including Sundance, Locarno and Telluride; screened in museums like The Louvre, MoMA, and the Academy Museum of Motion Pictures; and have received numerous awards for directing, producing, editing, writing, and cinematography as well as for excellence in political cinema, archival documentary, journalistic storytelling, and heterodox nonfiction. Previous films include the Academy Award-winning and BAFTA-winning NAVALNY (CNN/Warner Bros.), the Academy Award-nominated and Peabody Award-winning FIRE OF LOVE (Nat Geo/Neon), the Emmy Award-nominated THE LAST CRUISE (HBO), the Indie Spirit Award-nominated STRAY (Magnolia/Hulu), the Academy Award-nominated and Peabody Award-winning THE EDGE OF DEMOCRACY (Netflix), and the Sundance Award-winning ALL THESE SLEEPLESS NIGHTS (The Orchard). His latest film, KING COAL, premiered at Sundance 2023. Shane is a member of the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences.

Atanas Georgiev (Editor) is a Macedonia-based editor and one of the owners of Trice Films and Film Trick, subsidiaries of FX3X. His directorial and producing debut CASH & MARRY has won many international awards and recognition. This was followed by AVEC L’AMOUR, a festival favorite in 2017 that premiered at Hot Docs. He then edited HONEYLAND in 2019, a triple winner at the Sundance Film Festival that went on to be nominated for two Academy Awards for Best Documentary and Best International Feature. Atanas' most recent film as an editor AGAINST THE TIDE premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in 2023. Atanas is a member of the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences.

Marion Tuor (Editor) graduated from the National Film School of Denmark and has worked as an editor on several notable documentaries since 2007. She recently edited Talal Derki's, Heba Khaled's and Ali Wajeeh's UNDER THE SKY OF DAMASCUS, which premiered at this year's Berlinale and won the Golden Alexander prize in the international competition of the Thessaloniki Documentary Festival. INTO THE ICE by Lars Henrik Ostenfeld opened 2022's CPH:DOX, and HEARTBOUND by Janus Metz and Sine Plambech premiered at TIFF in 2018. Other documentary works include FREE THE MIND by Phie Ambo and BALLROOM DANCER by Andreas Koefoed and Christian Bonke, the latter having received a Special Jury Mention at the Tribeca Film Festival in 2012. Marion is a member of the German Film Academy.

Volker Bertelmann (Composer) is an internationally acclaimed pianist, composer and experimental musician. His score for Garth Davis' Oscar-nominated film LION, which he composed in collaboration with Dustin O'Halloran, and was nominated for multiple awards, including the 2016 Oscar for Best Original Score, the 2016 Golden Globes for Best Original Score, and Best Film Music at the 2016 British Academy Film Awards, or BAFTAs. He has provided music for several leading films and television series, including the score for PATRICK MELROSE, Showtime's Emmy-and BAFTA nominated mini-series, and for GUNPOWDER, the HBO mini-series starring Kit Harington, and the 2020 film AMMONITE, co-composed with O'Halloran, which received a spot on the Academy Awards short list for Best Original Score. In 2022, he scored ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT for Netflix, which won the Oscar for Best Original Score, and WAR SAILOR, both of which were official selections at the Toronto International Film Festival. A uniquely innovative pianist, who in his solo work goes by the name Hauschka, Bertelmann has worked with, among others, the MDR Leipzig Radio Symphony Orchestra, where he was the artist in residence, and the Grammy-winning violinist Hilary Hahn. In 2018, he accepted an invitation to join the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

Sahraa Karimi (Executive Producer) is a film director and screenwriter from Afghanistan who has become a leading figure in the Afghan film industry and has won numerous international awards for her work. During her Film Studies PhD from 2002 to 2012 at the Academy of Music and Performing Arts, Film and TV Faculty in Bratislava, Slovakia, she made around thirty short fiction and documentary films, many of which were successful internationally and broadcasted through ARTE France, BBC, and other European TV channels. In 2012, Sahraa returned to Kabul and established her own film production company, Kapila Multimedia House, to support Afghan independent filmmakers and artists. Her documentary film AFGHAN WOMEN BEHIND THE WHEEL (2009) won over twenty prizes from film festivals around the world. In 2019, Sahraa's first fiction feature film HAVA, MARYAM, AYESHA premiered at the Venice Film Festival. Shot entirely in Kabul with Afghan actresses, the film was Afghanistan's entry for the

Oscars that year, has participated in more than fifty film festivals around the world, and has broadcast on European TV. Sahraa is currently working on a feature film with the working title FLIGHT FROM KABUL.

Diane Becker (Executive Producer) is an Academy Award-winning producer and the co-founder of Fishbowl Films. NAVALNY won both the U.S. Documentary Audience Award and the Festival Favorite Award at the 2022 Sundance Film Festival and was awarded a BAFTA, PGA, DuPont, and the Oscar for Best Documentary Feature. Her films have screened in the most prestigious festivals across the globe and she has worked with companies like HBO, CNN, Showtime, Netflix, and PBS. Film credits include: MANHUNT, THE FINAL YEAR, LEGION OF BROTHERS, IF I LEAVE HERE TOMORROW, BELUSHI, and the Emmy-nominated TINA. Docuseries credits: FIVE CAME BACK, TRIAL BY MEDIA, and EQUAL. Fishbowl Films won a Peabody Award in 2019 for INVENTING TOMORROW (POV) and Diane and Melanie Miller were awarded the 2020 Sundance Institute/Amazon Producer's Award for Non-Fiction for WHIRLYBIRD. ON THE DIVIDE was broadcast on POV in 2022, just prior to the overturning of Roe v. Wade and STUTZ launched on Netflix at the end of last year. Her latest film, KING COAL, premiered at the 2023 Sundance Film Festival. Diane is the 2023 recipient of the Dear Producer Award and was a Sundance Documentary Creative Producing Fellow. She is a member of the Producers Guild of America (PGA), the Documentary Producers Alliance (DPA), the Television Academy, and the Academy Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS).

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In association with
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