



A Dream for Kabul

Director: Philippe Baylaucq, Canada, 2008, 81 minutes

In September 2001, Haruhiro Shiratori lost his son, Atsushi, in the New York City World Trade Center attacks. In the wake of this tragedy, many withdrew into their grief or talked of revenge. But Shiratori wanted to give meaning to his son's death, so he decided to travel from Japan to Afghanistan to connect with ordinary people in an attempt to end the cycle of violence. This idealistic quest, one destined to encounter any number of obstacles, begins with an unusual step: Shiratori decides 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 American. Magic becomes a secret weapon, as Shiratori negotiates his way around the language barrier. Even the saddest child in an Afghanistan hospital bed cracks a smile when he performs his tricks.

Over four years and across three continents, filmmaker Philippe Baylaucq accompanies Shiratori, documenting his quest to build a cultural centre for the children of Kabul. Everywhere he goes, he preaches, persuades, and relentlessly fundraises. Shiratori speaks about the suffering of Afghan children. He remembers his own war-torn childhood in Japan and looking at the children of Kabul, he sees himself, a child in a bombed-out city. The memory still haunts him.

His 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 offers his services for free. They include areas where people can assemble, a school, a water reservoir, and a garden of 911 Sakura cherry trees: a place where the cultures of Japan and Afghanistan can meet.

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

DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

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* and *Promise* (1981), show a pronounced taste for daring and experimentation. *Barcelone* (1985) cemented his position as an influential figure in art film. 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*.

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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