

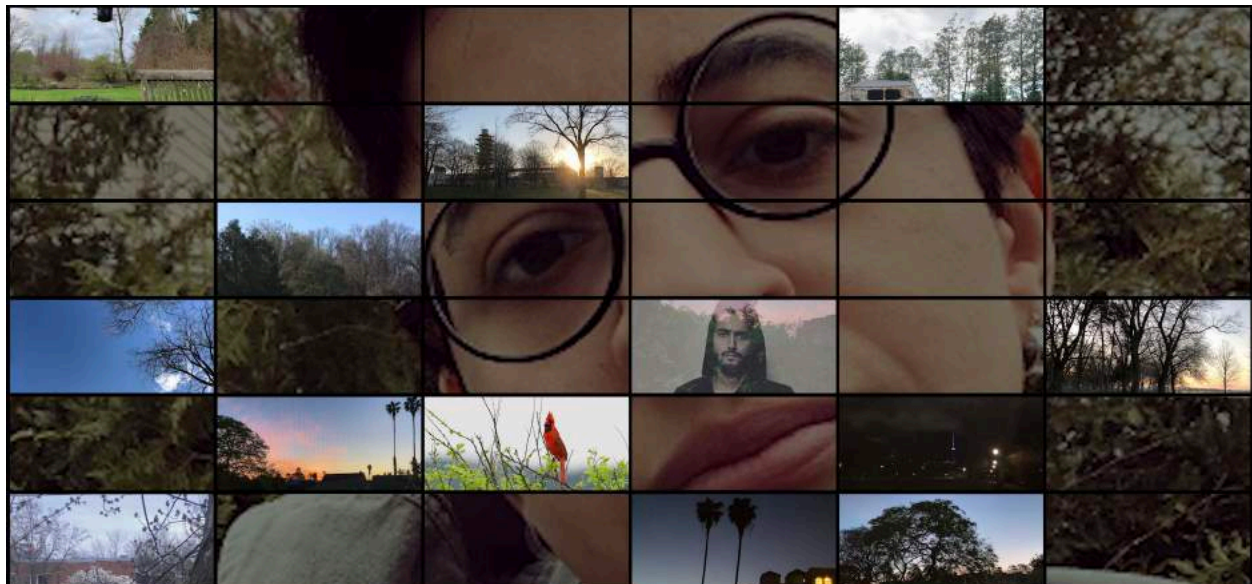


**INTERNATIONAL DAWN CHORUS DAY**  
**PRESS KIT**

## INTERNATIONAL DAWN CHORUS DAY

# SYNOPSIS

On International Dawn Chorus Day (May 3, 2020), birds from six continents join a zoom call. They gossip about storms and cats and wires and dates. They talk about Egyptian filmmaker Shady Habash, known for his satiric anti-dictator music videos, who died the day before in Cairo's notorious Tora prison. They wonder about Egyptian queer activist Sarah Hegazi, famously incarcerated for flying a rainbow flag at a Cairo concert, now living as a refugee in Toronto. They don't realize that a month later, unable to bear the pain of her prison trauma, Sarah will take her own life.



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# DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

On May 2, 2020, at the height of the first lockdown, two news stories grabbed my attention. First, that a filmmaker named Shady Habash had died in suspicious circumstances in Egypt's notorious Tora prison. Second, that the next day would celebrate the 36th annual International Dawn Chorus Day.

For me, these two stories combined to deliver a peculiar gut punch. Seven years earlier, I'd been locked up in that same prison, jailed in a roundup with hundreds of others in the aftermath of the Rabaa Square Massacre. As I learned more about Shady's life and work and death, and watched his videos, and read his final despairing letters that friends had smuggled out of prison, his words viscerally brought back memories of Tora. Staring at the dawn ceiling, watching the night shadows recede into the cool grey of morning. Straining to hear the faint call of the dawn chorus. "Prison doesn't kill, loneliness does."

I emailed friends and family on six continents, asking them to record their dawn choruses the next morning, shooting on their phones. 40 responded, bemused by the request, perhaps welcoming a change from the daily grind of their lockdown routines. Gathering the footage, my editor Kalil and I started to shape their clips into a whimsical zoom-grid, premised on the idea that birds from around the world had gathered to talk about Shady, trading theories and questions about what might have happened.

And then, a month later, Sarah Hegazi took her life. I was part of an ad-hoc queer group in Toronto, providing support to the dozen LGBT refugees from Cairo who'd just arrived, fleeing Sisi's dictatorship. They'd been arrested the year before for flying a rainbow flag at a Mashrou Leila concert. Sarah was one of them, and I'd met her a couple of times. She was unforgettable -- intense, passionate, deeply committed to radical change, tortured by nightmares of the three months she'd spent in prison, battling her demons the warmest of brave smiles.

Filming at her memorial, I was overwhelmed by the anecdotes and tears that poured forth from so many. She had touched many hearts and lives. Yet nothing could prepare any of us for the groundswell of tributes that followed, a wave across Europe and the Americas and the Arab world, in the months to come: vigils, concerts, songs, murals, poems. Bird songs.

For me, the stories of Shady and Sarah are bird songs, swooping and dipping like swallows at sunrise, joining the flock of so many Egyptian activists and artists, wrongfully incarcerated by the regime. In January this year, a Cairo chef was arrested for making cupcakes with penis decorations. In February, a film editor faced her eighth month behind bars, locked up for trying to deliver a letter to her brother, also imprisoned. Last week, the prisoners of Scorpion wing voted to continue their hunger strike, protesting the over crowding.

*International Dawn Chorus Day* is dedicated to Shady and Sarah and to every Egyptian enduring the horrors of wrongful detention.

## INTERNATIONAL DAWN CHORUS DAY

# TEAM



JOHN GREYSON (writer/director) is video/film artist and pioneer of the new queer cinema. Since 1984, his many features, shorts and transmedia works have explored such queer activist issues as police violence, prison, AIDS activism, solidarity, homo-nationalism and apartheid (both South African and Israeli). These include *International Dawn Chorus Day* (2021), *Mercurial* (2018), *Gazonto* (2016), *Murder in Passing* (2013), *Fig Trees* (2009), *Lilies* (1996), *Zero Patience* (1993), *The Making of Monsters* (1991) and *Urinal* (1989), and have received 40+ best film awards at such festivals as TIFF, Lisbon, Ann Arbor, Hamburg, San Francisco, Vancouver, Locarno, Montreal, Los Angeles, Sudbury and Hong Kong, as well as 3 Berlinale Teddies and 5 Canadian Screen Awards (Canada's Oscars). He teaches in York University's Cinema & Media Arts department, and is co-editor of *Queer Looks: Perspectives on Lesbian & Gay Film & Video*. His works are the subject of the critical anthology *The Perils of Pedagogy: The Works of John Greyson. I.D.C.D.* is his eighth film to premiere at the Berlinale.



KALIL HADDAD (editor) is a Toronto-based filmmaker. Often working in hybrid forms, he has directed six shorts including *As I Sat in His Car...* (2019) and *Farm Boy* (2019), both of which were recently acquired by Dekkoo. As an editor, he has collaborated with acclaimed filmmakers Kazik Radwanski (*Anne at 13,000 ft*, TIFF '19), Sophy Romvari (*Still Processing*, TIFF '20), and John Greyson (*International Dawn Chorus Day*, Berlinale '21). He holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Film Production from York University.



EVERETT MAJOR (sound) is a sound designer and musician who has worked on multiple short films and commercial projects. His work has been screened at the Toronto Queer Film Festival, Future of Film Showcase, Toronto Palestine Film Festival, and QFest Houston. He is a recent graduate of York University with a BFA in Film Production



SHANT JOSHI is a producer and president of Fae Pictures, an LA/Toronto-based production company with a mandate to “engage audiences with stories rooted in the perspectives of the Other.” His credits include films *Porcupine Lake* (TIFF), *Framing Agnes* (Tribeca), and *Pink: Diss* (CBC). Shant is a sitting member of the Board of Directors at BIPOC TV & Film, the Executive Leadership Team at IMPACT, the international committee at the CMPA, advocacy committee at PRO, advisory board at FOFS, and was recently named one of York University's Top 30 Change Makers under 30.

# INTERNATIONAL DAWN CHORUS DAY

## CREDITS

A FILM BY JOHN GREYSON

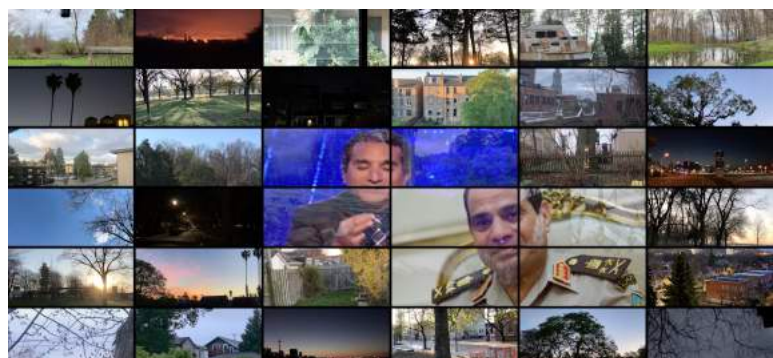
EDITOR: Kalil Haddad  
SOUND: Everett Major  
PR/SALES: Shant Joshi

### CINEMATOGRAPHY:

Anonymous (Imbaba, Cairo)  
Anonymous (Tora, Cairo)  
AA Bronson (Berlin)  
Shu Lea Cheang (Paris)  
Richard Fung (Dades, Morocco)  
Shohini Ghosh (Delhi)  
Maureen Greyson (Coventry)  
Dee Dee Halleck (Willow)  
April Hickox (Toronto)  
Nancy Kim (Seoul)  
Lyne Lapointe (Mansonville)  
Jack Lewis (Vanwyksdorp)  
Loring McAlpin (New York)  
Maki Mizukoshi (Tokyo)  
Daniel Negatu (Vancouver)  
Jane Park (Sydney)  
Su Rynard (Toronto)  
Amil Shivji (Dar Es Salaam)  
Dieylani Sow (Dakar)  
Almerinda Travassos (Prince  
Edward County)  
BH Yael (Toronto)

Anonymous (New Cairo City)  
Sofia Bohdanowicz (London)  
Julie Burleigh (LA)  
Sheila Davis (Halifax)  
Rebecca Garrett (Toronto)  
John Greyson (Toronto)  
Sharon Hayashi (LA)  
Nelson Henricks (Montreal)  
Michelle Jacques (Victoria)  
Prabha Khosla (Burnaby)  
Stephen Lawson (Montreal)  
Catherine Lord (Hudson)  
Alexis Mitchell (Glasgow)  
Ken Morrison (Cuernavaca)  
Martha Newbigging (Consecon)  
Pamela Rodgerson (Toronto)  
Lior Shamriz (Glendale)  
Cheryl Sourkes (Montreal)  
Richard Tillmann (Bayfield)  
David Wall (Toronto)

Dedicated to the memory of  
Shady Habash & Sarah Hegazi,  
and all of Egypt's prisoners.



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