



presents

EMPTYING THE SKIES

A film by
Douglas Kass and Roger Kass

77 min., 2013

Press Materials:

<http://www.musicboxfilms.com/emptyingtheskies-press>

Official Site:

<http://www.musicboxfilms.com/emptyingtheskies>

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SYNOPSIS

Based on the seminal New Yorker Magazine essay by best-selling novelist and executive producer Jonathan Franzen, EMPTYING THE SKIES exposes the rampant poaching of migratory songbirds in southern Europe. Songbird populations have been drastically declining for several decades, with a number of species facing imminent extinction. This poignant documentary explores the wonder of these tiny globe-spanning marvels, millions of which are unlawfully trapped and killed each year for large sums on the black market, and follows the intrepid squad of pan-European bird-lovers who risk their lives waging a secret war against poachers, to disrupt illegal trapping to free as many as possible.

Embedding filmmakers Douglas Kass and Roger Kass with their activist subjects, this year-long undertaking transports viewers right onto the front lines as poachers are confronted at critical migration pinch-points in Cyprus, France and Italy. A moving call to arms in the spirit of THE COVE, EMPTYING THE SKIES chronicles a devastating environmental tragedy and the valiant journey of those risking their lives to stop it.

ABOUT THE COMMITTEE AGAINST BIRD SLAUGHTER (CABS)

The activist organization featured in EMPTYING THE SKIES, The Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS), is an action-oriented and operational society founded in Berlin in 1975. Possessing a small administration and executive board, their approach is rapid reaction whenever and wherever required to protect endangered wildlife.

CABS intervenes in particular where bird trappers, hunters or animal traders commit offences against current nature protection legislation in Europe. Their volunteers execute well-organized operations in many European countries where migrant birds are either shot or illegally persecuted by the use of traps, nets, and lime sticks. In Italy, France, Malta, and Cyprus they annually collect more than 50,000 mist nets and traps, monitor hundreds of hunters, and support the police in bringing poachers to justice.

In each area they visit, CABS takes great care to consult with the responsible police, forest or customs authorities. In addition, through initiatives at the parliamentary level, they aim for improvements in the legal guidelines for wildlife, nature and species protection. CABS is in constant contact with important authorities and decision-makers in Brussels, Rome, and Berlin. They also distance themselves fundamentally from militant actions or measures that do not comply with the prevailing legislation in the country of operations.

DIRECTOR BIOGRAPHY

Douglas Kass is an Adjunct Professor of Filmmaking and Film Studies at Elon University in North Carolina. He has a Master of Arts from the University of Southern California School of Cinema-Television and a Bachelor of Arts with High Honors in Film/Art from Wesleyan University, where he also received the prestigious Frank Capra Award.

Emptying the Skies is his first feature-length film. His previous work includes several short subjects such as the documentary *Behind the Walls of S-21*, a devastating recollection of life and death at the notorious S-21 Prison during the Khmer Rouge era in Cambodia, which included rare interviews with survivors and the prison's most notorious executioner. *Behind the Walls of S-21* was funded by the United Nations and distributed by The Documentation Center of Cambodia on Independent Networks throughout Asia.

PRODUCER / CO-DIRECTOR BIOGRAPHY

Roger Kass is a producer of motion pictures including multi-Oscar and Golden Globe nominee *A History of Violence*, directed by David Cronenberg; *Edmond*, based on David Mamet's play and screenplay, starring William H. Macy; *Liberty Kid* by Ilya Chaiken; the PBS American Masters series *Andy Warhol: A Documentary Film*; and Ti West's indie horror hit *The House of the Devil*.

He is also an entertainment and media lawyer, for which his credits include *The Basketball Diaries* starring Leonardo DiCaprio, Oscar-winner *Affliction*, and *The Crow*, Brandon Lee's tragic final film. He has also served pro bono for The Lawyers Committee for Human Rights Refugee Project.

Roger Kass earned his BA in East Asian Studies from Wesleyan University and a JD from Boston University School of Law, where he was a Paul J. Liacos Distinguished Scholar and an American Jurisprudence Constitutional Law Award winner.

JONATHAN FRANZEN BIOGRAPHY

Born in Western Springs, Illinois, in 1959, Jonathan Franzen grew up in Webster Groves, Missouri, a suburb of St. Louis. After graduating from Swarthmore College in 1981, he studied in Berlin as a Fulbright scholar and later worked in a seismology lab at Harvard.

He is best known for his non-fiction essays and the award-winning novels *The Corrections & Freedom*. He is the author of a bestselling collection of essays, *How to Be Alone* and the memoir *The Discomfort Zone*. He recently published a new English translation of the play *Spring Awakening* by Frank Wedekind. He has written the New York chapter of Matt Weiland and Sean Wilentz's 2008 collection *State by State: A Panoramic Portrait of America*, inspired by the state guides written for the WPA in the 1930s. His short stories and his essays, including political journalism, have most recently appeared in *The New Yorker*, *The Best American Essays*, *The New York Times*, and *The Guardian*. A collection of his nonfiction, *Farther Away* (which includes *Emptying the Skies* re-titled as *Ugly Mediterranean*), appeared in 2012.

Jonathan Franzen's first novel, *The Twenty-Seventh City* (1988), was a reimagination of his hometown St. Louis, through the eyes of conspirators and terrorists from southern Asia. His second novel, *Strong Motion* (1992), was a thriller-cum-love-story set in the student slums of Boston. Both books displayed Franzen's ability to connect the personal and the political, the emotional and the social, in compelling and richly textured narratives.

The Corrections was an enormous international bestseller, with translations in 35 languages, American hardcover sales of nearly one million copies and nominations for nearly every major book prize in the country, including a win for the National Book Award.

The success of Franzen's novel *Freedom* led to him being featured on the cover of TIME Magazine in 2010--only the second time in the last decade that a living writer has appeared on the cover of the prestigious national magazine. The book debuted at #1 on the *New York Times* bestseller list and won the 2011 John Gardner Prize for fiction and the Heartland Prize. It was also chosen as one of the *New York Times* 10 Best Books of 2010 and as a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award and the Los Angeles Times Book Prize. In 2012, Franzen was voted into the American Academy of Arts and Letters and also awarded the first Carlos Fuentes Medal at the 26th Guadalajara International Book Fair.

His upcoming novel *Purity* will be published in the fall of 2015.

ANDREA RUTIGLIANO BIOGRAPHY

Born in Milan in 1978, Andrea was always passionate about wild animals. On his 14th birthday he received his first binoculars, which exposed him to the world of birds—first in the city, then in Europe and later around the world. Compelled to do more for nature than just enjoy it, at 18 he started volunteering to stop bird trapping in Italy.

After majoring in anthropology, he worked for 2 years in the Ecuadorian Amazon to implement fauna and flora management plans together with the indigenous Achuar population. In 2008, he returned to his original passion: protecting European birds from hunters and trappers and is now leading CABS' anti-poaching camps in the Mediterranean.

TECHNICAL DETAILS

R/t: 77 minutes
HDCAM, Color
English with English Subtitles

Director: Douglas Kass
Co-Director: Roger Kass
Producer: Roger Kass
Executive Producer: Jonathan Franzen
Executive Producer: Andrea van Beuren
Editor: Michael Levine (Emmy-award for "Restrepo")
Cinematography: Douglas Kass, Michael Tucker ("Gunner Palace") Original
Score: Marty Beller ("In Treatment," "They Might Be Giants" drummer)
Additional Music: Laurie Anderson

ABOUT MUSIC BOX FILMS

Founded in 2007, Music Box Films is a leading distributor of international, American independent, and documentary content in North America along with the best in international TV series and mini-series.

Releases in 2014 included Roger Michell's LE WEEK-END, written by Hanif Kureishi and starring Jim Broadbent; the Emmy Award-winning French language series "The Returned"; Pawel Pawlikowski's 2015 Academy Award®-winning film IDA; and the Sundance Audience Award-winning documentary THE GREEN PRINCE.

Recent titles include Edet Belzberg's award-winning documentary WATCHERS OF THE SKY, Dominik Graf's BELOVED SISTERS, Germany's official submission to the Academy Awards®, and Shlomi and Ronit Elkabetz's GETT: THE TRIAL OF VIVIANE AMSALEM, Israel's official submission to the Academy Awards®.

Music Box Films is independently owned and operated by the Southport Music Box Corporation, which also owns and operates The Music Box Theatre, Chicago's premiere venue for independent and foreign films.