



presents

# We Are The Giant

a film by

**Greg Barker**

90 min., 2014

**Rated TBD**

Press materials:

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

Official site:

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

**NY/National Publicity**

Murphy PR

John Murphy

[jmurphy@murphypr.com](mailto:jmurphy@murphypr.com)

Russ Posternak

[rposternak@murphypr.com](mailto:rposternak@murphypr.com)

212-414-0408

**LA Publicity**

Laemmle Theatres

Jordan Moore

[jordan@laemmle.com](mailto:jordan@laemmle.com)

310-478-1041 x208

**Music Box Films Marketing & Publicity**

Brian Andreotti: [bandreotti@musicboxfilms.com](mailto:bandreotti@musicboxfilms.com)

312-508-5361

Rebecca Gordon: [rgordon@musicboxfilms.com](mailto:rgordon@musicboxfilms.com)

312-508-5362

**Distribution Contact**

Andrew Carlin

[acarlin@musicboxfilms.com](mailto:acarlin@musicboxfilms.com)

312-508-5360

## **SYNOPSIS**

*We Are The Giant* transports viewers to the front lines of the Arab Spring through the courageous stories of six extraordinary people grappling with the dilemma at the heart of all struggles for justice and freedom: whether to take up arms and fight, or to advocate change through peace and non-violence. Filming largely in secret and at great risk over the past two and a half years, award-winning director and former war correspondent Greg Barker (*Manhunt*) frames intimate portraits of individuals from very different walks of life resolving to stand up for what they believe in and challenge the oppressive regimes determined to crush popular uprisings.

Mobilizing in the streets in Libya, Syria and Bahrain, as well as on Facebook and Twitter, these inspired young activists have been awakening the world to their plight and changing the course of history. Among these unlikely heroes are the outspoken sisters Maryam and Zainab Alkhawaja (whose Twitter handle “Angry Arabiya” has over 40,000 followers), both fiercely determined to protest for human rights even under perpetual threat of imprisonment and exile. This timely documentary follows the everyday decisions that transform not just personal lives but the fates of nations, reminding us that we are all products of revolutions and offering hope in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds.

## **DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT**

Two and a half years ago, my team and I set out to make a film about revolutionaries. We ended up making a film about ordinary heroes, about people who are in many ways just like you and me, but who are transformed when they do something that sounds simple but is in fact incredibly courageous: they stand up for their ideals.

Like the act of courage itself, telling these stories was far easier said than done, and we had to employ the techniques of the revolutionaries themselves just to get the stories out. Much of it was filmed in secret, under dangerous circumstances, but in the process my team and I had the great privilege to witness something rare and glorious — it sounds corny, but it was as if we had a ringside seat at history.

I've always been intrigued and haunted by the question of what I would do if required to fight for the freedom we all take for granted. And so, as we immersed ourselves in the stories of these characters, I found myself turning inwards and asking questions like: *What ideals do I truly stand for, and would I have the courage to be a revolutionary myself? If I had been alive during the American War of Independence, would I have taken up arms and joined the fight? Or, during the 1950s, would I have embraced the Civil Rights struggle, and the ideals of non-violence advocated by Dr. Martin Luther King?*

I've spent my professional life traveling the world seeking out compelling stories, and I honestly believe some of the individuals whose stories we tell in WE ARE THE GIANT may well be destined to become truly historic figures, who will be written about decades to come. Right now, however, they're virtually unknown. Why? Because powerful, well-connected forces don't want you to know about them and have successfully used their lobbying prowess, combined with extreme violence, to divert our attention elsewhere. I hope this film will help set this balance right, because the inspiring and humbling people whose stories we tell not only deserve attention, they demand it.

Finally, on a personal note, I'd like to add a special thank you to the film's co-producer Razan Ghalayini, a young and fiercely determined Arab-American filmmaker, whose extraordinary contribution included her ability to go places on the ground where a middle-aged guy from California wouldn't necessarily blend in. Thanks also to the many other individuals whose names we cannot reveal who risked their lives to bring these stories to the screen.

**Greg Barker**  
**January 2014**

## **BACKGROUND**

The general impression is that uprisings across the Middle East have been violent failures. This is wrong. Revolutions take years, sometimes decades, to play themselves out and so it is far too early to pass judgment.

What is clear is that, while the nature of the revolutionary experience is in many ways timeless, the tactics and methods employed by today's revolutionaries are a product of the internet age – and we sought to employ these same tactics and methods to tell authentic stories that reveal a truth closer to what is actually happening inside the revolutions still convulsing the region.

Documentation is imperative. Because the mainstream media coverage is limited by public attention, safety issues for correspondents, and press restrictions imposed by brutal regimes, many citizens of conflict zones have taken it upon themselves to document the mounting violence and daily violations of their most basic rights.

To access these untold stories, WE ARE THE GIANT co-producer Razan Ghalayini, who speaks Arabic and is of Arab descent, developed an extensive network of contacts among activists across the region. She then used this network to secretly travel to locations where director Greg Barker would have stood out and revealed our film's true purpose. [Barker, for instance, has previously filmed in Bahrain, under close government supervision.] Ghalayini conducted in-person interviews under difficult circumstances and liaised with activist networks collecting some of the most damning footage and then helping activists find ways to smuggle these materials across borders.

We were especially determined to tell the story of the non-violent activists who helped begin the Syrian revolution, in the Damascus suburb of Dariya. This story has never been reported before, because of the extreme danger involved in traveling to Dariya, and yet it debunks a central myth the Syrian regime has propagated with remarkable success: that the uprising was violent from the start.

This key and important section of the film would never have been possible without the unrelenting work of young Syrian cameraman Fadi Dabbas, who provided the team with the extraordinary conflict footage in the Syrian portion of the film. Fadi seems to have lived the lives of six men: he has survived and filmed every major attack in Dariya, including the massacre that killed 600 people in just three days. When he contacted the WE ARE THE GIANT team via internet shortly after the massacre, he had just returned from helping to dig a mass grave. One of his paramount concerns was that the footage he had risked his life to shoot would be used in the film, because he so passionately believed that the world needed to know what was truly happening inside Syria.

Bassel Shehadeh, a young aspiring Syrian filmmaker and non-violent activist, was working with the film's team in its early stages. He was killed in Homs in May of 2012. His friends have been unable to track down most of the footage he had shot for WE ARE THE GIANT. Shehadeh worked very closely with activist Motaz Murad and Rushdie, the

doctor who appears briefly in the film. Losing him only redoubled the filmmaker's resolve to get footage from inside Syria.

In Bahrain, most of the footage also came from activists inside the country who Ghalayini met during one of her many secret visits to document the story of the AlKhawaja sisters and their father. Also – surprisingly – some of the most damning footage, including close-ups of the riot police, were actually filmed by the Bahraini government itself and released online, perhaps as a warning to those who would challenge its authority. Objective, on-the-ground reporting on Bahrain by foreign journalists is almost impossible, as the regime has imposed notoriously tight restrictions on any visiting foreign correspondent, and those who seek to operate independently, away from the government minders, are routinely deported. Although she was tear-gassed more than once, Ghalayini managed to avoid the regime's detection during her many visits to Bahrain over the past two years, which enabled WE ARE THE GIANT to capture the activism of two of the film's central characters, Maryam and Zainab AlKhawaja.

## **HISTORY OF THE REVOLTS**

### **LIBYA:**

The Libyan revolution was armed within three days of its inception. Young and inexperienced boys from all walks of life took to the streets together to fight for the liberation of their country. They formed ragtag battalions and engaged in what can only be described as guerrilla warfare. Most young men, like the American-born Muhannad Ben-Sadik, had never shot a gun before. While they were triumphant (with the decisive help of US military intervention), Libya has a long way to go before they achieve the kinds of reform and government for which the youthful resistance sacrificed so much.

### **SYRIA:**

In March of 2011 and on the heels of the apparent success of the Egyptian and Libyan revolutions, non-violent activists across Syria worked tirelessly to spark what would become the Syrian revolution. Some activists worked in secret using code names, while others, at great personal risk—like Ghassan Yassin in Aleppo and Motaz Murad in Dariya—lent their faces and voices to the cause. It took many weeks of organizing and numerous arrests until the one-off protests became a full-on revolution. However, taking a cue from brutal past regimes that managed to crush uprisings, like China in Tiananmen Square, the Assad regime responded with unrelenting ferocity. The city of Homs was razed, citizens in Dariya were murdered and countless non-violent protesters were arrested and tortured. This violence prompted young men to take up arms and form the now infamous Free Syria Army, or FSA. The FSA rose to the top of the media's coverage of the Syrian revolution and the non-violent activists, the ones who began the revolution and who are keeping it alive, were largely silenced. It is the goal of the filmmakers that the instrumental and untold stories of these non-violent revolutionaries be heard.

### **BAHRAIN:**

Ruled absolutely by the Al Khalifa family since 1783, Bahrain is also the headquarters of the US Navy's Fifth fleet and is a major center for operations. In 2002 the nation was officially designated a "major non-NATO ally" putting it in an exclusive group that includes Israel, Japan and Australia. In February of 2011, sixty percent of Bahrain's citizens took to the streets of Manama, the capital, and called for the fall of the regime. The government cracked down on the protesters and arrested and tortured non-violent community leaders. Thousands of Bahraini citizens were injured and dozens killed. Because of Bahrain's special relationship with the United States, these violations were largely ignored and the government's withering public relations campaign ensured marginalization of the voice of the majority of the population. Bahrain is considered the most fragile of all the gulf monarchies including Saudi Arabia, and many independent analysts believe that the fall of the Bahraini ruling family could precipitate similar uprisings in neighboring kingdoms.

## **ABOUT THE FILM'S SUBJECTS**

### **Osama Ben-Sadik – Benghazi, Libya**

Osama Ben-Sadik is the father of the Libyan-American Muhannad Ben-Sadik, who was killed while fighting alongside the rebels in Brega, Libya. Despite his initial skepticism and fear, he joined the opposition forces at his son's behest and was greatly influenced by the young man's compassion, commitment and sacrifice. He divides his time between Martinsville, Virginia and Benghazi, Libya.

### **Ghassan Yassin – Aleppo, Syria**

A prominent activist of the Syrian revolution, Yassin was working as a cab driver when he helped organize the first non-violent protest in Aleppo. During his arrest and torture by the Assad regime, he was overjoyed, despite his horrifying circumstances, to overhear a fellow prisoner talking about the spreading protests. Currently living in near exile, he works across the border to assist the rebellion. Both the ISIS and the Assad regime want Ghassan Yassin dead or alive.

### **Motaz Murad – Dariya, Syria**

One of the leaders of the non-violent resistance in Dariya, Syria, Murad has been engaging in non-violent protest since the 1990s. Prior to the revolution, he spent two years in prison during which time he was repeatedly tortured by the Assad regime. Murad, who has remained in his embattled neighborhood, has never taken up arms and continues to organize acts of non-violent resistance. Both ISIS and the Assad regime want Motaz Murad dead or alive.

### **Zainab AlKhawaja – Manama, Bahrain**

A Bahraini human rights activist, wife and mother, AlKhawaja rose to prominence in 2011 thanks to her live tweeting of the Bahraini revolution under the moniker @AngryArabiya. Although she has only engaged in non-violent resistance, she has been arrested multiple times and is currently in jail for "inciting hatred against the regime." Her father, internationally acclaimed human rights activist Abdulhadi AlKhawaja, was recently sentenced to life imprisonment for participating in acts of non-violent resistance in Bahrain.

### **Maryam AlKhawaja – Stateless**

26-year-old human rights defender Maryam AlKhawaja was banned from her home country of Bahrain after participating in early protests against the government. A tireless activist, she lectures and lobbies around the world. AlKhawaja is also the acting president of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights, having had to take over the reins after the arrest of Bahraini Opposition party leader and the Center's former head, Nabeel Rajab. Her father, human rights activist Abdulhadi AlKhawaja, was recently sentenced to life imprisonment for participating in acts of non-violent resistance in Bahrain.

## **ABOUT THE CREW**

### **Greg Barker — Director and Producer**

A former war correspondent-turned filmmaker, Greg Barker is dedicated to telling powerful stories that raise understanding of international relations and the moral choices that shape individual and national actions. Described by *The New York Times* as "a filmmaker of artistic and political consequence," Barker won the Primetime Emmy for Best Documentary for MANHUNT, an inside account of the conflict with Al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden, which premiered at Sundance 2013. His previous films include KORAN BY HEART, SERGIO, and several films for PBS' Frontline, including the award-winning GHOSTS OF RWANDA. He was based in London for much of his adult life and now lives in Los Angeles.

### **Razan Ghalayini – Co-Producer**

A graduate of New York University's Tisch School of The Arts, Razan Ghalayini is an emerging Arab-American filmmaker. Her Arabic-language short film NOOR played at film festivals around the world and was the winner of the Warner Brothers Film Award and the National Board of Review Student Film Award. She was the Associate Producer on KORAN BY HEART, which was directed by Greg Barker, produced by John Battsek and Julie Goldman and premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival in 2011.

### **John Battsek - Producer**

One of the most prolific independent producers in the UK today, John Battsek began his producing career in 1999 with the Academy Award-winning ONE DAY IN SEPTEMBER. He has since been responsible for over twenty-five theatrical documentaries including Greg Barker's SERGIO, Academy Award-nominated RESTREPO and the Academy shortlisted THE TILLMAN STORY. Battsek executive produced SEARCHING FOR SUGAR MAN, which opened Sundance Film Festival 2012, winning the Special Jury Award and the Audience Award, culminating in a successful theatrical release and finally the 2013 Academy Award for Best Documentary. He also executive produced THE IMPOSTER, which was released theatrically in the US and UK in 2012 and made the Academy Award 2013 shortlist.

### **Julie Goldman - Producer**

A specialist in producing and executive producing documentary features, Julie Goldman may be best known for three of her award-winning films, GOD LOVES UGANDA, MANHUNT and GIDEON'S ARMY, all of which premiered at the Sundance Film Festival. Goldman also produced BUCK, which was one of 2011's top five grossing documentaries and shortlisted for an Academy Award. She consulted on the Academy Award-winning documentary THE COVE and produced SERGIO, for which the PGA nominated her for the Producer of the Year Award. Some of her earlier films include: AI WEIWEI: NEVER



SORRY, A PLACE AT THE TABLE, EASY RIDERS RAGING BULLS, DEVIL'S PLAYGROUND and SKETCHES OF FRANK GEHRY.

**Joshua Altman - Editor**

Known for his strong narrative sense and compelling visual flair, Joshua Altman is a highly regarded editor of feature documentary films. His previous work includes: WE LIVE IN PUBLIC, winner of the Grand Jury Prize at the Sundance Film Festival 2009 and nominated by The Cinema Eye Honors for 'Outstanding Achievement in Editing,' and award-winning, Academy Award shortlisted THE TILLMAN STORY. He also edited BONES BRIGADE: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY, which was the number one viewed documentary on iTunes when it was released in 2012.

**Philip Sheppard - Composer**

A virtuoso cellist and a Fellow of the Royal Academy of Music, Philip Sheppard is a film composer and producer specializing in soundtracks, theatre projects and stadium sized live events. His film scores include: IN THE SHADOW OF THE MOON, SERGIO, MANHUNT, BOBBY FISCHER AGAINST THE WORLD, THE TILLMAN STORY, LOVE MARILYN, THE FLAW and FIRST ORBIT. He has collaborated with musicians as diverse as Queens of the Stone Age and Jeff Buckley to David Bowie and Jimmy Page. Among his many stadium and event projects, Sheppard has composed music segments for the Beijing Olympics 2008 closing ceremony, the London Olympics 2012 medal ceremonies and designer Alexander McQueen's runway show Sarabande at Paris Fashion week.

# **CREDITS**

**Directed By**  
Greg Barker

**Co-Produced By**  
Razan Ghalayini

**Produced By**  
John Battsek  
Julie Goldman  
Greg Barker

**Editor**  
Joshua Altman

**Music Composed and Performed By**  
Philip Sheppard

**Produced in Association with**  
The Mill

**Line Producer**  
Diane Becker

**Executive Producer**  
Christina Weiss Lurie  
Hani Farsi  
Jeffrey Lurie  
Tony Tabatznik

**Co-Executive Producers**  
Kerstin Emhoff  
Andrew Ruhemann

**Directors of Photography**

Muhammed Hamdy  
Frank-Peter Lehmann

**Production Executives for Passion Pictures**

Nicole Stott  
George Chignell

**Associate Producer**

Alex Dunnett

**Consulting Producer**

Tim Williams

**Archival Research and Clearances**

Kate Coe

**Assistant Editors**

Faroukh Virani  
Tuan Le

**Additional Photography**

Timothy Gruzca  
Fadi Dabbas  
Razan Ghalayini

**Field Production**

Suliman Ali Zway  
Jaylan Auf  
Christopher Buchanan  
Claudia Rizzi

**Main Titles & Visual Graphics**

The Mill  
Titles & Design: Manija Emran  
Executive Producer: Stephen Venning  
Producer: Elizabeth Newman  
Animators: Justin Sucara  
Victor Duncan  
Greg Park  
Coordinator: Jacqueline Sand

**Archive Materials**

Associated Press

Corbis

eFootage

Video and Imagery supplied by Getty Images

ITN

Journeyman Pictures

National Library of New Zealand

Stock footage courtesy of the WPA Film Library

**Additional Music**

“Festival”

Written by: Jon Thor Birgisson / Orri Pall Dyrason / Georg Holm / Kjartan Sveinsson

Performed by Sigur Rós

©2011 Universal - Songs Of PolyGram International, Inc.

on behalf of Universal Music Publishing Ltd. (BMI)

“Stormur”

Written by: Jon Thor Birgisson; Orri Pall Dyrason; Georg Holm

Performed by Sigur Rós

©2013 Universal - Songs Of PolyGram International, Inc.

on behalf of Universal Music Publishing Ltd. (BMI)

“Matadjem Yinmixan”

Performed by Tinariwen

Written by Ibrahim Ag Alhabib

Courtesy of Independiente Ltd

© 2006 Independiente Ltd

“Soixante Trois”

Performed by Tinariwen

Written by Ibrahim Ag Alhabib

Courtesy of Independiente Ltd

© 2006 Independiente Ltd

This film would not have been possible without the invaluable contributions of many individuals who risked their lives to tell these stories.

Among these was Bassel Shehadeh, a young journalist and cameraman who was killed in Syria in May 2012

## **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 IDA, the official Polish submission to the Academy Awards®; and the Sundance Audience Award-winning documentary THE GREEN PRINCE.

Upcoming releases include 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.