

## **How 'People of the Wind' Came To Be Made**

**(A recollection by its producer/ director)**

The cinema feature film People of The Wind and the two main TV derivatives, The Sheep Must Live (without music, BBC World about us) and The Bakhtiari Migration (with music, sold to a network TV company in just about every country in the world) came into general circulation in the mid-1970s.

How it came about is as follows.....

I knew Shusha Guppy as a magazine journalist (not as an Iranian folk singer or even, especially as an Iranian). When she proposed writing a story for the Telegraph Magazine about the Bakhtiari migration (more correctly Transhumance but...), the magazine asked me if I would mind being the photographer. They explained it would be a long hard assignment, 2 to 3 months, but would only make one issue. This would make it totally uneconomic as a photo essay. However, they thought we might all recover our losses through syndication over the years. Promises, promises.

I used my pictures from the Telegraph 1970 shoot to make the story-board for what, to me after that first migration, had, from the start, to be a real film. Not just a documentary for TV but a full length feature documentary for the cinema. When we went back the next year to shoot the film, Shusha came with me again, this time working on the film crew as interpreter and general advisor on Bakhtiari history and culture.

I first heard of 1930s classic documentary about the Bakhtiari migration 'Grass' when I supplied the BBC with a cutdown, truncated version of my main film for The World About Us TV slot. 'Grass' came up during an argument with the BBC producer (Anthony Isaacs) who wanted Shusha to write and commentate the film in the first person. This had never been my intention as director. In fact there was no appropriate footage of Shusha and no on-camera recordings.

When I heard about 'Grass' I was stunned. I had to make a decision. I decided I would not look at it until after I had launched People of The Wind, the film I had gone to Iran to shoot. I had responsibilities to my backers in California and Chicago. So it came to pass. End of 1976, six years after my first trip to the Zagros mountains and after the launch of People of The Wind, I watched a print of 'Grass'. I enjoyed the film. Watching it then confirmed that I had been right not to let any of my directorial decisions for People of The Wind be influenced by the 1930s film. Also it explained at lot about why the BBC saw Shusha as a modern 'celebrity' explorer travelling by mule with the Bakhtiari. It explained why Shusha's (she was a good friend) accent and style did not rankle with the BBC in the way it did with me. They saw her as part of the performance, every bit as much as the Bakhtiari people.

Interestingly, I felt that 'Grass' also explained 'King Kong'. Even the drama of the Bakhtiari Migration was not enough to satisfy cinema audiences of the time, so those two seasoned wild life and exploration documentary makers decided to create a gorilla movie but with a larger than life gorilla.

I remember that when we had effectively finished the film after about sixyears, two Bakhtiari migrations, years of fund raising and a year of editing and finishing, we asked David if he would come to LA and check the translations that Shusha had done of many of the original recordings. We also wanted him to listen to the tapes and check the film sync soundtrack to see if any of the comments made by "My" small cast of Bakhtiari characters were worth including in the script or, indeed, putting up as subtitles on the screen.

I, as producer director, also wanted the whole film checked by an anthropologist to make sure we were not making any serious academic or cultural mistakes. And David Koff's script needed checking. David Brooks did a good job for us as our consulting anthropologist. He spent longer with us than expected because the screen writer, David Koff, was constantly writing and re-writing right up to and through the night before I recorded James Mason in a Geneva studio. Such is the nature of script writers.

David Brooks was a nice guy, got on with the job and was easy to work with and, evidently, knew his subject well. His friends and family should be proud that I am constantly being reminded that the film which we all made almost 40 years ago is still highly regarded!

**Notes:**

Any regrets? Looking back, not really. Raising the money, about \$1.2 million, was a miracle. Of this the BBC paid £10,000, international TV syndication a net £25,000. The rest represented recoverable tax losses to the US backers. Pity the huge Walter Reade theatre in downtown San Francisco went into so called Chapter 11 after our really successful run of 15 weeks plus 9 weeks in another of their cinemas in Berkeley. They never paid the close to \$200,000 they owed. That stopped us dead and put the brakes on further serious distribution, the project ran out of money. That's the reason why the film was never released in Europe.

The film. Well as director I can still watch it. That is unusual. The photography, story line and especially the editing all stand the test of time. Probably should have used a little less music in the final mix but that doesn't really worry me. I was tempted to drop some tracks at the last minute, but by then it had all cost so much. Better use them? The sound track album sold out instantly in California, so...

I am grateful to Dennis Doros of Milestone films for all the work he did to recover the original negative and sound tracks and digitize to DVD. He was helped, I understand, by Martin Scorcese who, I am told, is a fan of the film.

Anthony Howarth  
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