



俳句  
haiiku  
on a plum tree



FESTA  
DEL CINEMA  
DI ROMA  
13/23 OTTOBRE 2016

## HAIKU On a Plum Tree

a documentary film by MUJAH MARAINI-MELEHI





©Fosco Maraini

Tokyo 1943: Italian anthropologist Fosco Maraini and painter Topazia Alliata refused to sign allegiance to Mussolini. They were imprisoned with their three daughters, Dacia, Yuki and Toni. Today, Toni's daughter Mujah explores her family's experience and legacy by trying to bring their memories to life by retracing their steps in her own journey to Japan.

## Director's Note

Our lives are defined by choices. "With my own two feet, I walked to prison. I made the choice." Up until her final breath this past November my 102-year old grandmother Topazia Alliata is proud of her choice. In 1938, she had chosen to go live in Japan with my grandfather Fosco Maraini, anthropologist and photographer, after leaving Fascist Italy in protest. When they were later put on house arrest in Tokyo in 1943, she chose not to sign the document adhering to the Republic of Salò, thereby condemning herself and her daughters (Dacia, Yuki, and my mother, Toni) to be the only female prisoners and the only children in the Japanese prison camp. The family survived two years before they were released at the end of the war. During their difficult imprisonment, Topazia kept a diary. It too survived, and it too, with its yellowing pages, my grandmother's fading cursive pencil trails and Dacia's occasional doodling, is a central character in this project. This little green notebook is the only known (and published) eyewitness account of a Japanese prison camp written by an Italian woman. She kept it in a locked cabinet by her bed, and she carefully pulled it out for me whenever I asked to see it. She entrusted it and her story to me.

I believe that my grandmother's choices altered our internal map, our DNA, and our moral integrity for two generations. As a child, I often wondered what it would have been like if my grandmother had lied and signed the paper just to keep her children safe. Today, as a woman and a mother, I understand that all those family anecdotes I grew up hearing about are actually powerful, profound stories. Stories of hunger, heartbreak, sacrifice, honor and courage. Topazia walked to prison. She chose it. However, we as a family have to reconcile the harsh reality of that -- having survived that choice. Every child of a survivor understands that there are wounds and responsibilities that find their way to the next generation. How do I trace what I am and what my inheritance is? A family tree is made of choices, of forks in the road, of maps and places. I am a product of these choices. Mine and theirs. This film project is a visual memoir, a personal journey into my family's history and legacy as a granddaughter, a daughter and as a mother. This journey of understanding and reconciliation through conversations, interviews, and documents takes me to Japan to retrace my family's experience by visiting some of the sites from their past including both prison camps Tempaku and Nagoya. The scenes, memories, and journey will be told through animation, maps, voices and framed by Dogugaeshi screens opening up to reveal deeper layers of the story, leading us into a world of mystery, memory, wonder, pain, and silences so we can understand where we are now.



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Directed by Mujah Maraini–Melehi  
Written by Mujah Maraini–Melehi  
Deborah Belford de Furia  
Cinematography Maura Morales Bergmann  
Editing Letizia Caudullo  
Music Ryuichi Sakamoto  
Original theme “Italian Ainu” Ryuichi Sakamoto  
Production Design and puppets Basil Twist  
Sound Jacopo Pineschi, Danilo Romancino,  
Camera Virginia Eleuteri Serpieri, Masayoshi Nishi  
Sebastiano Facco  
Produced by Maurizio Antonini Mujah Maraini–Melehi  
A production by Interlinea Film e Haiku Film  
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Archivio Alinari  
Crowdfunding 193 backers  
Nazionalità Italia  
Year of production 2016  
Locations Italy/Japan  
Tokyo, Nagoya, Rome, Florence, Bagheria Sicily  
Length '74  
Format HD  
Projection format DCP (B/N e color)  
sound Digital DTS  
Original language English /Italian/Japanese subtitled in English  
Press Agent Storyfinders Lionella Bianca Fiorillo  
+39.06.36006880 +39.340.7364203  
press.agency@storyfinders.it  
Interlinea Film via Vittorio Veneto 146 - +39.06.42085767  
info@interlineafilm.com - www.interlineafilm.com  
Haiku Film contact@haikusonaplumtree.com

credits not contractual

## HAIKU on a Plum Tree

With:

Topazia Alliota

Fosco Maraini

Toni Maraini

Dacia Maraini

Mujah Maraini-Melehi

Keiko Kano

Norio Kumamoto



*Kosai-Ji, Nagoya. October 2015*

## Crowdfunding

Haiku on a Plum Tree was made possible thanks to a crowdfunding campaign with Kickstarter, raising almost \$60,000 from 193 backers from 8 different countries, many from the United States.

## Creators

### **Mujah Maraini-Melehi** (director, screenwriter, producer)

Mujah grew up in Morocco, Italy and the United States where she graduated at Sarah Lawrence, studying theatre with Shirley Kaplan and film with Gilberto Perez. She continued to study filmmaking at Boston University, acting at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts in London, Actor's Studio in New York and privately with John Strasberg and Allen Savage, while performing at La Mama, directed by Ellen Stewart. She worked in theatre and television in the US where she lived for over twenty years. The documentary "Haiku on a Plum Tree" is her first film and marks her return to Italy.

### **Deborah Belford de Furia** (screenwriter, artistic producer)

Born and raised in New York City, Deborah graduated from Brown University. She worked as an actress in the US before coming to Rome where she studied screenwriting at Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia. As a story editor, she trained with Dara Marks and Linda Seger and went on to work as story editor and analyst for over 16 years at Medusa Film. She has collaborated with RAI Cinema, Mediaset and numerous independent producers in Italy and the US, working with both young and established directors and writers, such as Marco Bellocchio. In addition to screenwriting and story editing, she works as a ghostwriter and translator.

## Production Design and Music

### **Basil Twist** (Dogugaeshi, puppets)

is a New York City-based puppeteer who is best known for his underwater puppet show, "Symphonie Fantastique". Basil is a third generation puppeteer and one of the most important forces in puppetry in America today. He is the sole American to graduate from the École Supérieure Nationale des Arts de la Marionnette in Charleville-Mezieres, France. His productions have toured the world. Basil has received an Obie, a Drama Desk Award, five UNIMA Awards, two Bessie Awards, a New York Innovative Theatre Award, a Henry Hewes Award, a Guggenheim, a USA Artists fellowship and was most recently awarded a Doris Duke Performing Artist Award. In 2012 Washington D.C. hosted a retrospective of his work, Twist Fest D.C. .

### **Ryuichi Sakamoto** (composer)

Ryuichi Sakamoto began his career in the 1970s, first gaining major success in 1978 as a member of electronic music group Yellow Magic Orchestra (YMO), playing a pioneering role in the development of the synthpop, techno and house genres. As a film composer, he has won an Academy Award, BAFTA, Grammy, and two Golden Globe Awards. Merry Christmas Mr. Lawrence marked his debut as a film score composer and as an actor, and its main theme was adapted into the single "Forbidden Colours" which became an international hit. He earned more accolades for such films The Last Emperor, The Sheltering Sky, Little Buddha, and The Revenant.