



FINDING SALLY

A FILM BY TAMARA DAWIT

PRESS KIT



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CatBird
PRODUCTIONS

FINDING SALLY

2020 | Documentary | Canada | 78 minutes
Original English and Amharic version with English subtitles

Written and Directed by Tamara Dawit
Producer: Isabelle Couture | Executive Producer: Katarina Soukup
Catbird Films



LOGLINE

A personal investigation into the mysterious life of the director's aunt Sally, an Ethiopian aristocrat-turned-communist-rebel who disappeared during the Ethiopian Revolution.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

Finding Sally tells the incredible story of a 23-year-old woman from an upper-class family who became a communist rebel with the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party. Idealistic and in love, Sally got caught up in her country's revolutionary fervour and landed on the military government's most wanted list. She went underground and her family never saw her again.

Four decades after Sally's disappearance, Tamara Dawit pieces together the mysterious life of her aunt Sally. She revisits the Ethiopian Revolution and the terrible massacre that followed, which resulted in nearly every Ethiopian family losing a loved one. Her quest leads her to question notions of belonging, personal convictions and political ideals at a time when Ethiopia is going through important political changes once again.

LONG SYNOPSIS

Sally was an aristocrat, a dignitary's daughter, and an Embassy brat. Her father's posting as an Ethiopian diplomat meant that the family lived in various countries before settling in Canada in 1968. Selamawit Dawit – Sally to her friends – went to Carleton University in Ottawa and was a bright, outgoing young student with many friends and hopeful suitors. In the summer of 1973, Sally traveled to Ethiopia on holiday. She never came back.

In a few short months, Sally's life changed drastically. She went from being a party girl obsessed with clothes and perfume to a communist and women's group leader who gave speeches against the Ethiopian government.

During her tumultuous time in the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa, she was swept up in the Marxist movement after meeting Tselote Hizkias, deputy commander and future rebel leader of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (the EPRP). Deeply in love, Sally and Tselote were married in a small civil ceremony. Together, they fought to overthrow Emperor Haile Selassie. In power since 1930, Selassie was Ethiopia's Head of State and a close acquaintance of Sally's father.

In September of 1974, the military junta ("the Derg") toppled Selassie in a military coup. Its leader, Mengistu Haile Mariam, declared himself Chairman, ignoring the communist ideals and youth movement that powered the revolution. The EPRP challenged the Derg's rule and pushed for a broad-based civilian-run democracy while also engaging in campaigns against the military government. The Derg, in turn, launched attacks against the EPRP, sending both the military and armed peasant groups to track down hundreds of "enemies of the state." Violence soon became widespread across the country.

Sally and her husband hastily went underground. Together, they escaped Addis Ababa and vanished into the mountains of Northern Ethiopia. For years, Sally's family searched for her throughout Europe, Africa and North America. They desperately chased rumours of her whereabouts, showing her photo to strangers and seeking help from mystics.

Some forty years after the events, director Tamara Dawit pieces together the mysterious journey of Sally, the aunt she never knew. No one in her family had been willing to speak about this mysterious relative, but after years of persistent questioning, family members are starting to fill in the blanks.

Like most Ethiopians, the Dawits learned to stay silent about events that occurred during the "Red Terror" – a bloodbath from 1977 to 1978 that Amnesty International has stated was responsible for the slaughter of hundreds of thousands of people. The Derg remained in power until 1991.

If time doesn't necessarily heal such deep wounds, it at least allows the fear to gradually subside. Today, in a time when Ethiopia is going through important political changes once again, many Ethiopians are ready to share their story. Using Sally's personal history as a thread, the film sheds light on a dark and little-known chapter of Ethiopian history.

Finding Sally features intimate testimonials from Tamara's grandmother and aunts, a moving collection of recovered family photos, a wealth of fascinating stock footage from the 60s and 70s, and evocatively crafted visuals that invoke the presence of Sally throughout the story. Who was Sally? How and why did she become a revolutionary? Whatever the answers may be, one thing is certain – Sally's fate is deeply entwined with the fate of the countless individuals who died during the Red Terror.

OFFICIAL SITE

findingsally.com

OFFICIAL TRAILER

vimeo.com/catbird/findingsally



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

As a child, I grew up hearing elaborate stories about their childhoods from my vibrant Ethiopian aunts – tales about their grandmother helping the war effort against the Italians, meetings with fortune tellers, hitching in Europe, lavish cocktail parties, or sneaking out to go to the beach. The stories were pleasurable and exciting, painting a vision of a wonderful past. However, I could never decipher which stories were true and which ones had been spiced up with their typical Ethiopian romanticism.

Lost in all their stories was Sally, a family member that no one ever mentioned to me. It wasn't until my early 30s that I had stumbled upon a photo of Sally, but the family was hesitant to talk about her. Little by little, I managed to convince my grandmother and then my aunts to share Sally's story.

Each of my aunts has her own version of events and point of view regarding Sally. However, despite their differences in opinion, my aunts all share a common sense of loss. The film poses the question that arises when someone you love disappears without a trace: how do you cope? It explores not only how my family has managed this loss, but also how the entire country has managed the loss, pain, and trauma of the Red Terror (a period of sustained state violence). My family is just a small example of how many Ethiopians are still dealing with those deaths, and how the fear of public mourning under the military government forced so many people to suffer in silence.

My aunt Sally and many of her peers lost their lives fighting for what they believed could be a better Ethiopia. They envisioned a united and democratic Ethiopia that would embrace everyone equally – something I think is still possible despite the dangerous ethnic divisions that plague Ethiopia today.

I hope that Finding Sally can be a plea for freedom of speech and critical thinking, and also an indictment of silence in general in Ethiopia. Even today, as young people frequently protest the government, their elders are still hesitant to talk about their own activism and past losses which closely mirror many aspects of the present-day situation. I hope that this film can be a catalyst to discussing the country's past and engaging in critical discourse about the road ahead.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In the 19th and early 20th century when most African countries were still in the grips of European Colonialism, Ethiopia was a respected, self-governing nation. It had defeated an Italian invasion in 1896 and came to be recognized as a legitimate state by European powers. In 1930, the coronation of Emperor Haile Selassie I galvanized the country's sense of black empowerment, dignity and independence, and made him an icon.

Ethiopia was attacked again by Italian fascists in 1935, forcing the Emperor to flee the country and plead for aid at the League of Nations. The occupation, however, didn't last very long. A combined force of British soldiers and Ethiopian rebels managed to drive the Italians out of the country in 1941, and Haile Selassie returned to the throne, stronger than ever.

The Emperor gradually amassed political power and parliament became little more than a feeble imitation of democracy. The only source of law in the country was the Emperor himself and any dissent or political opposition was deemed treason. But in the 1970s, the autocratic regime of Haile Selassie became increasingly contested. A coalition of communist activists, students, workers and peasants started demanding a more democratic state through peaceful strikes and protests. In 1974, the Emperor was overthrown by the military junta called "the Derg" – the "Coordinating Committee of the Armed Forces, Police, and Territorial Army." Soon after, the Derg led by chief commander Mengistu Haile Mariam established an authoritarian military government. Anyone contesting his leadership became an "enemy of the state."

In 1977, the Derg launched the "Red Terror," a violent and repressive political campaign that led to mass imprisonments and assassinations. Anyone in disagreement with the Derg's communist policies could face severe punishment. People would disappear without reason. Others would be tortured, or put in jail simply because they were related to a wanted person. Houses were searched. Perhaps most excruciating of all, mourning someone killed by the Derg was illegal, and families were forced to repay for the bullets that had killed their loved ones. The Derg remained in power until 1991.

Amnesty International estimates that 500 000 people died during Derg leadership. In 2008, the Ethiopian Supreme Court found Mengistu guilty of genocide in absentia and sentenced him to death. In spite of his conviction, Mengistu continues to find sanctuary in Zimbabwe because of his friendship with Zimbabwean president Robert Mugabe; the country refuses to extradite him.

PARTICIPANTS



TSEHAI (Sally's mother) is the daughter of an Eritrean advisor to the Emperor who during the Italian invasion of Ethiopia led clandestine missions from Sudan with the British. Tsehai grew up in Sudan and Ethiopia, and after completing her high school education in Khartoum, got married at the age of 16. A devout Catholic, Tsehai was the dominant force in her household, making sure school and

church were priorities. She also helped her husband manage his diplomatic calendar, advised him on his work, and controlled the family's finances. During the Derg period, most of her family's lands, farms and properties were confiscated by the government. Up until her death, she was still making claims in Ethiopian courts for the return of her land and houses.

BRUTAWIT is Sally's oldest sister and the Dawit family matriarch. When she was 17, she married an older man of her father's choosing in a ploy to move to the US and away from her parents. By the age of 23, she was divorced with three children, had a full time job, and was putting herself through graduate school in Washington, D.C. In addition to being singer Dionne Warwick's business manager, Brutawit worked in senior roles in the financial sector in the US and the Middle East before moving back to Ethiopia to become the country's first female bank CEO. She is both respected and feared in the Ethiopian business community. Now retired, she produces and hosts her own current affairs TV talk show.





Sally's sister, KIBRE, is the free spirit of the family. Bohemian and romantic, she hitchhiked across Europe and spent some time in an ashram before settling in Ethiopia in 1972. She was the first certified teacher of Transcendental Meditation (TM) in Africa, having been taught by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (spiritual guide to The Beatles). Kibre set up a meditation school with the support of the Emperor, and was married for a short while to a theatre

actor with whom she had a daughter. During the Derg regime, she continued teaching meditation until she was jailed in 1977. After her release, she moved to Canada and studied art in Montreal, where she dated Leonard Cohen. She then moved to Washington, D.C. to attend graduate school and met Black Panther leader Stokely Carmichael, with whom she became romantically involved throughout the 1980s. Kibre moved back to Ethiopia in 1991, and has been running universities and a microfinance bank for over two decades.

Sally's sister, MENBIE, was the one who originally tracked down some of Sally's old comrades in an effort to learn more about her sister's life. Menbie spent part of the 1970s in Nigeria working as an English teacher and then in the 1980s worked in Northern Canada with the Inuit. She had a long career with the United Nations which saw her posted in Iran, Syria, Sudan and other countries. She recently retired and is now adjusting to living in Ethiopia for the first time in her life, along with her Canadian husband.





As a member of the Dawit family, TSION is stubborn and always thinks she is correct. However, as the youngest sister she occupies a disadvantageous position in the family. After teaching English in tough Washington, D.C. public schools for over 20 years, she retired to open a restaurant in Ethiopia. She lives with Mama Tsehai at her home, along with two wards she is raising. TSION has a bitter-sweet personality that she acquired as a result of events in her life: her first husband, the love of her life, was killed in a car accident while driving to be with TSION after she'd

learned of Sally's death. Her second husband with whom she had one daughter is also deceased. TSION mostly remembers Sally as her fun-loving older sister who would encourage her to sleep around and enjoy life. That happy time with Sally seems very remote to her now.

ABREHET (Sally's mother-in-law) is the mother of three children who all died during the Red Terror, Tselote being her oldest. Her husband passed away when her children were still young. As a single working-class mother, she raised her children in a strict Catholic home. During the Red Terror, the Derg officials raided her house numerous times and she and her mother were arrested and jailed for a few months. The raid resulted in the loss of all the family photos and other personal possessions. Abrehet's youngest son Yitbarek was tortured and killed by the Derg for attempting to kill Mengistu with a grenade. Her teenage daughter was captured and shot while trying to flee the country. When the Derg members went on trial, Abrehet was interviewed as part of the evidence collection. Today she lives in a small house with her two nieces and spends much of her time at church praying.



CREATIVE TEAM

About the Director **Tamara Dawit**

Tamara Dawit is an Ethiopian-Canadian filmmaker based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia where she runs a production company, Gobez Media. Tamara also manages the Creative Producers Training Program which supports the development, training, and export of Ethiopian film and music content. She directed the short film, **Grandma Knows Best** (2014) and the feature documentary **Finding Sally** which will be released in 2020. She is currently producing the feature documentary **Qeerroo** (2020) and the feature drama the **Last Tears of the Deceased**. Tamara has experience producing documentary and digital content for CBC News, MTV, Radio-Canada, Discovery, NHK, and Al Jazeera among other networks.

She was in residency with Docs in Progress in Washington, D.C. in 2018 and the Talents Durban documentary lab in 2015. She is a member of Brown Girls Doc Mafia and the Film Fatales.

About the Producer **Isabelle Couture**

For 15 years, Isabelle has produced several TV and feature-length documentaries for the big screen, notably **The Amina Profile**, a critically acclaimed feature documentary by Sophie Deraspe that world premiered at Sundance in January 2015 and was selected in more than 30 festivals around the world. She joined Catbird Productions as a producing partner in fall 2015. She is vice-chair of the Documentary Organization of Canada and also sits on the board of Hot Docs.

About the Editor **Mahi Rahgozar**

Mahi Rahgozar has been editing films in all genres for the past 20 years. She has an impeccable sense of story and pace and a relentless eye for detail. She often collaborates with directors forming stories before and during production, and always works very closely with composers and sound designers to create the final sound landscape of the films she edits. Mahi started her career in Denmark where she graduated from Denmark's world-renowned National Film School in 2001. Shortly after, she edited the short comedy **This Charming Man** which won an Oscar in the Live Action Short Film category at the 2002 Academy Awards. She has since edited a number of award-winning films, both documentary and fiction. Since 2008, Mahi Rahgozar has been living in Toronto, Canada, where she continues to work both as an editor and as a story consultant, mostly in the documentary scene. She has edited several Canadian feature documentaries, such as **Driving with Selvi**, **Bee Nation** and **Gift**.

About the Cinematographer Alex Margineanu

Alex is a cinematographer and filmmaker based in Montreal, Canada. He has shot over seventy documentary films, series, and many other projects, including fiction, over the past fifteen years. His cinematography credits include collaborations with directors Carl Leblanc (***Nation, The Heart of Auschwitz, The Hostage***), Daniel Sivan/Mor Loushy (***The Oslo Diaries***), Bart Simpson (***Brasilia: Life After Design***), Bachir Bensaddek (***Montréal la blanche, Arab Rap, Je m'voyais déjà***), Sophie Lambert (***Amours criminels, Bagarreurs***) Harold Crooks (***The Price We Pay***), Alex Gibney (***Gladiators***), Helene Klodawsky (***Grassroots in Dry Lands, Come Worry With Us***), Bruno Boulianne (***L'Homme de l'isle, Bull's Eye, 50 tonnes d'épinette***), Danic Champoux (***Sessions, Baklava Blues, Caporal Mark***), Isabelle Lavigne (***Le 4125, rue Parthenais***), Stéphane Thibault and Karina Goma (***Les justes, Todo Incluido***), Hugo Latulippe (***Maestro!***), among many others. Alex is keen to find and develop each project's distinct visual style in symbiosis with the director's personal vision. His visual influences range from documentaries by Gilles Groulx to video art by Bill Viola and fiction by Lynn Ramsey. Alex is Romanian-born, has been living in Montreal for thirty years, graduated from Concordia University, and worked as a first assistant cameraman with Jean-Claude Labrecque and Michel La Veaux among others.

About Catbird Productions

Catbird Productions was founded in 2006 by Katarina Soukup. A Montreal-based boutique production company, we make award-winning documentaries for Canadian and international audiences, whether they be theatrical docs, TV docs or interactive web docs. We are particularly interested in films about art, culture, the environment, music, and human rights. We have the privilege of working with incredibly creative talents and put an emphasis on supporting diverse voices. We've partnered with CBC, Radio-Canada, ARTV, Canal D, TV5, NHK, DR, Al Jazeera, Sundance, *documentary* Channel, Icarus Films, The Cinema Guild, Terranoa, Doc & Film, K-Films Amérique and Les Films du 3 mars. Catbird has also collaborated with researchers at the Mobile Media Lab at Concordia University and at the Centre for Global Social Policy at the University of Toronto.

About the Music

The score of ***Finding Sally*** is a collaboration between Canadian and Ethiopian musicians and as such draws inspiration from both musical styles. It also includes samples from the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party anthem "My Life Is For The Struggle" and "Yefyel Wetete," a traditional war song used by the Derg to announce the individuals they had killed on the radio. Throughout the score, the voice of Zaki Ibrahim is included as a representation of Sally's voice and presence in the story.

About Zaki Ibrahim, music composer

Described as “a retro-Afrofuturist vision sending listeners on a journey through 40 years of electronic music,” Ibrahim’s music and production brings elements of spoken word, hip hop, soul, house and 70s pop together, filtered through the lenses of personal, historical and scientific relativities. Ibrahim’s two full-length albums, multiple EPs and experimental, multi-disciplinary digital projects, including 2018’s *The Secret Life of Planets* and the Polaris Music Prize shortlisted *Every Opposite*, show the multitudes of this artist’s scope.

Throughout her career, from Vancouver to South Africa to Toronto and many points in between, Ibrahim has worked against the encroaching systems and machinery that would limit or dilute her vision. Ibrahim’s work pushes back against binaries, against reductiveness, against the clenching muscles of expectation. Along the way, Ibrahim has been recognized with a JUNO Award nomination for R&B/Soul Recording of the Year, and made festival appearances from Cape Town to Berlin, Cairo to Los Angeles, and beyond. Recent film festival performances and soundtrack projects have located Ibrahim in cinema and television, further expanding her impressive range of experience.

About Abegasu Shiota, additional arrangement

Abegasu Shiota one of Ethiopia's most sought-after music producers. Half-Japanese and half-Ethiopian, Abegasu Shiota was born in Japan and raised in Ethiopia. He is a graduate of The Berklee College of Music in Boston and today operates Langan Records, a recording studio in Ethiopia.

As a musician, producer and arranger, he has worked on hundreds of albums with musicians including Mahmoud Ahmed, Teddy Afro, Aster Aweke, Girma Bèyènè, Tilahun Gessesse, Zeritu Kebede, and others.

About Alister Johnson, additional arrangement

Alister Johnson is a music producer, composer, DJ, record collector and musical mind who specializes in electronic, soul, hip-hop, disco, and otherworldly sounds. His music has been featured on numerous television network productions and commercials (Discovery, History Channel, CTV, Global, etc) for the past 15 years. He has an affinity for analog synthesizers and dusty percussion pieces, which he combines with drum machines, an open mind, and a desire to discover music both new and old.

PRODUCTION DETAILS

Duration 78 minutes
Production Company Catbird Films, Inc
Language English, Amharic

Creative Team

Producer Isabelle Couture
Writer Tamara Mariam Dawit
Director Tamara Mariam Dawit
Cinematographer Alex Margineanu
Editor Mahi Rahgozar
Original Music Zaki Ibrahim
Sound Catherine Van Der Donckt, Benoît Dame

Shooting Format HD, 16:9 aspect ratio
Sound 5.1 & stereo
Screening Format DCP, Blue-Ray
Locations Ethiopia, United States
Broadcasters *documentary* Channel
Distributor / Sales Agent Cinema Politica (Canada) / Rise & Shine (World)

FULL CREDITS



Catbird Films
presents

In Association with
documentary Channel

FINDING SALLY

a film by
Tamara Mariam Dawit

Writer and Director
TAMARA MARIAM DAWIT

Featuring
TSEHAI TSEFAMICHAEL
ABREHET ASEFA
TAMARA MARIAM DAWIT
KIBRE DAWIT
TSION DAWIT
BRUTAWIT DAWIT
MENBERE DAWIT
FERKETE GEBREMARIAM
ASHENAFI KERSMA
BRUR GEBRAI

Producer
ISABELLE COUTURE

Director of Photography
ALEX MARGINEANU

Editor
MAHI RAHGOZAR

Original Music
ZAKI IBRAHIM

Sound
CATHERINE VAN DER DONCKT

Executive Producer
KATARINA SOUKUP

Produced with the financial participation of



Canada^{CA}
The Canadian Film or Video
Production Tax Credit



Developed in collaboration with



Story Consultant Script consultant – Narration	RICARDO ACOSTA HELENE KLODAWSKY
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Production Manager Production Managers – Ethiopia	AGATA DE SANTIS HAMLET AREGA
--	---------------------------------

ASHENAFI GIRMA KERSMA

JOY MUCHINA

Production Assistants	BERHANE MEDHIN LEUL SHOAFERAW ZEMEN
-----------------------	---

Drivers	YISHAK MELKE TEWODROS TEFAY GIRMISA TRAVEL
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Additional Camera	ESKINDER FASIL
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Additional Sound	ASHENAFI LAKEW NICK WILSON
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Post-production Supervisors	JULIEN TREMBLAY MÉLANIE GAUTHIER ANNE-MARIE BOUSQUET
Post-production Coordinator	MARIE-PIER DUPUIS

Assistant Editors	MARY KOMECH MARIE-OCÉANE COLLIGNON SAMUEL ÉMOND-TREMBLAY PIER-YVON LEFEBVRE MICHEL LESSARD FRÉDÉRIC OUELLET GUILLAUME ROUZIC MARIE-ÈVE VIGNOLA
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Colourist	VICKIE-LYNN ROY
Online Editor	FRANÇOIS BONNELLY
Technical Director	ANNE-SOPHIE H. OUELLET
Project Coordinator	ALBAN BERG
	MATTHIEU GASS
Subtitling Supervisor	JULIE MORISSETTE
Sales Manager	JULIEN MASSON
Translators	NIYAT NURU MEBRAT
	AMBAYE KIDANE

Creative Director	MATHIEU TREMBLAY
Motion Designer	DARIA PELSHER
Graphic Designer	MICHEL OUELLETTE
Project Manager	MÉLANIE BOUDREAU-BLANCHARD

Studio Manager	GALILÉ MARION-GAUVIN
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Sound Designer	CATHERINE VAN DER DONKT
Foley Artist	STÉPHANE CADOTTE
Foley Recordist	ISABELLE LARIN
Narration Recordist	CATHERINE VAN DER DONKT

Mix	BENOÎT DAME
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Mixer Assistant	JÉRÉMIE JONES
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Music Arrangement	ZAKI IBRAHIM
Additional Arrangement	ABEGASU SHIOTA
	ALISTER JOHNSON
	MICHAEL PETER OLSEN

Cello / String	MICHAEL PETER OLSEN
Saxophone	ABEY OSMAN
Kirar	SURAPHEL ASRESS
Keys	ABEGASU SHIOTA
Guitar	GIRUM MEZMUR
Male Singer	ABEBAW GETACHEW
Female Singer	ZAKI IBRAHIM

Engineer ABEGASU SHIOTA
Mixer ALISTER JOHNSON

Additional Music

"Daughter"
Performed by: Zaki Ibrahim
(Zaki Ibrahim, Alister Johnson,
Abegasu Shiota, David Ariza)
Published by: Girl On A Horse

"Neteb Theme"
Performed by: Henok Mehari
Published by: Henot Mehari

Archives
ABREHET ASEFA
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THE CANADIAN PRESS
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ETHIOPIAN PRESS AGENCY
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JOURNEYMAN PICTURES

KINOLIBRARY
LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA
NETEB MEDIA
THE RED TERROR MARTYRS' MEMORIAL MUSEUM
SCREENOCEAN (REUTERS)

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Digital Marketing & Community Outreach	KATHY SPERBERG
Social Media & Online Engagement	JACKIE GARROW (Ring Five Impact Docs)
Website Art Direction	DOMINIC TURMEL RAYMOND DEBLOIS

Web Developer DAVID MONGEAU-PETITPAS
(Folklore)

Demo Editors EAMON O'CONNOR
ALEX BERGERON
PHILIPPE ST-LAURENT-LÉVESQUE

Image Post-production PMT
Title and Motion Design OTTOBLIX
Music Studio LANGANO RECORDS
Re-recording Studio MEGAFUN
Subtitles TRANS & SUB COOP

Legal VANESSA LOUBINEAU
Accounting AGATA DE SANTIS

CAROL ANN GREGORY
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TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING COLLEGE
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RED TERROR MARTYR'S MEMORIAL MUSEUM
RIDM DOC CIRCUIT
SAINT PETER AND PAUL CATHOLIC CEMETERY

IN MEMORY OF SELAMAWIT DAWIT, TSELOTA HIZKIAS
AND ALL THE YOUNG PEOPLE WHO HAVE GIVEN THEIR LIVES
FIGHTING FOR A BETTER ETHIOPIA.

Produced in association with



Senior Director, *documentary* Channel
SANDRA KLEINFELD

Production Executive, *documentary* Channel
JORDANA ROSS

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PRODUCTIONS

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