

# THE PROPHET

by KHLIL GIBRAN

narration THANDIE NEWTON  
a film by GARY TARN

LAND media productions present THE PROPHET original English language text abridged from THE PROPHET written by KHLIL GIBRAN narration THANDIE NEWTON  
music composed and performed by GARY TARN solo cello EMILY BURRIDGE executive producer BJ CUNNINGHAM original soundtrack available at www.theprophetfilm.com



*The Prophet*, a film directed and composed by BAFTA-nominated Gary Tarn (*Black Sun*, 2005) takes Kahlil Gibran's classic novel and spins it into a cinematic exploration of love, life and loss.

Shot on his solo travels to Serbia, Lebanon, New York, Milan and London with a 16mm and HD camera Tarn filmed people, situations and places that resonate with, rather than illustrate, the theme of Gibran's text.

The result is a film featuring images from around the globe that act as a visual equivalent to Gibran's written word and create a common, contemporary thread between each culture.

*The Prophet* is visually striking, finding beauty in the everyday - moviegoers who like a film that makes them think will relish its beautifully evocative nature.

And, in a stroke of exquisite taste, the film is narrated by British actress Thandie Newton who delivers Gibran's captivating prose with an intimate reading, woven into a score for orchestra, guitar, cello and synthesiser.

First published in 1923, *The Prophet* has sold millions of copies worldwide and was the bible of the 60's counter-culture, famous for its main character's simple, inspiring answers to the questions with which all of us grapple. Its timeless message continues to be read and to inspire people around the world today.

Tarn's own account of his early filmmaking states:

**“I started my journey in Beirut, Lebanon, the country of Gibran's birth, some months after the Israeli - Hezbollah clashes of 2006. Streets were still dotted with soldiers, armoured vehicles and checkpoints. Barbed wire sectored the city, and Hezbollah supporters had occupied squares in the centre of the city. It was quickly obvious that wandering around with a 16mm film camera, as I had done on previous travels, wasn't an option, as I would have been swiftly moved on or arrested. I hired a driver and a taxi with blacked-out windows, and found that this way I could travel almost invisibly, shooting directly through the glass”**

Running time 75 minutes.

*The Prophet* will be screening at the ICA London from 21 September and other select regional cinemas from 28 September 2012

A press screening will take place at 3pm on Thursday 13 September 2012 at the ICA London.

A special preview and Q&A session will take place at 8.45pm on Thursday 20 September also at the ICA London.

For further information visit [www.theprophetfilm.com](http://www.theprophetfilm.com)

YOUTUBE trailer <http://bit.ly/uBFQjZ>

Original soundtrack album available for direct download [www.theprophetfilm.com](http://www.theprophetfilm.com)

## **THE PROPHET - THE BOOK**

First published in 1923, *The Prophet*, Gibran's hugely popular guide to living, has sold millions of copies worldwide and is the most famous work of spiritual fiction of the twentieth century.

Gibran's *Prophet* speaks of many things central to daily life: love, marriage, beauty, joy, eating, work and death. The spiritual message he imparts, of finding divinity through love, blends

eastern mysticism, religious faith and philosophy with simple advice. *The Prophet* has been credited with founding the New Age movement. Always among Amazon's best-sellers, it still continues to inspire people around the world today.

## **DIRECTOR BIO**

Gary Tarn is a filmmaker and composer, born in London, England. A keen traveller, he became captivated by the music of Indonesia, Africa and India and studied these, alongside the work of European orchestral composers. A passion for film led to a career as a media composer. It was a natural progression to consider shooting and editing images of his own. In 2000, against all rational advice, he decided to try to make a film of his own, alone. Using a classic 1970's 16mm film camera he started to shoot his debut essay feature *Black Sun*, travelling in the USA, Iceland

and India. Based on interviews with the blind author Hugues de Montalembert, the film was released in 2005, won numerous awards, and was nominated for a film BAFTA. Tarn's most recent project is an adaptation of *The Prophet*, Kahlil Gibran's classic book of philosophical fiction, with narration by Thandie Newton.

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## Notes on 'THE PROPHET'

*The Prophet* seems to be one of those books that you have either never heard of, or vaguely know (and maybe associate with weddings), or love, and have a deep connection with. My own relationship with the book began many years ago, although I don't recall how a copy originally came into my life, or found its way onto my bookshelf. But there it lodged, moving with me from home to home, resisting any cull or clear-out with the assured conviction that it would be needed one day.

For the book seems to have the words appropriate for the big moments in life; yet it says them quietly, and *The Prophet's* continuing popularity indicates that it touches many people deeply.\*

Some years ago, given another copy by a dear friend, I happened to read it straight through. I was struck by the imagery and the poetry, and I wondered if it might be possible to make a film based on the text: a personal response to Gibran's prose. I had just spent a little time watching and filming Alfonso Cuarón and his crew at work on his sci-fi epic 'Children of Men', and perhaps that accounted for a head full of soldiers, burned out cars and ruined buildings. But an idea had formed to set the film in a contemporary, or even subtly futuristic world, as a foil to Gibran's classical prose.

I would travel with my camera, and find the poetry in everyday life. William Blake's microcosmic quote,

'To see a world in a grain of sand,  
And a heaven in a wild flower,  
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand,  
And eternity in an hour'

(which appears at the start of the film), served as a guide to both the shooting and editing: that one might find larger truths in the smallest of things. Thus the gestures of tourists in Times Square, become a choreographed dance (On Friendship); Karmic Indian passers-by ignore a disabled woman lying in their path (On Giving).

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on or arrested. I hired a driver and a taxi with blacked-out windows, and found that this way I could travel almost invisibly, shooting directly through the glass. The black windows acted like a filter and served to both reduce the contrast and desaturate the images, inadvertently creating a unique look for the film.

Travelling through Lebanon in the hills of Bsharri, Gibran's birthplace, I found giant cedars, and a village emerging from clouds : in Belgrade, Serbia I found bombed-out buildings preserved in the centre of the city - a reminder of recent turbulent times. In New Bedford, an old whaling town up the coast from New York, I found fisherman departing for weeks at sea, as snow fell and birds grouped into migrating clouds. In London, I travelled by rickshaw amongst hundreds of naked cyclists who gathered to remind motorists of the fragility of the human body, and filmed Brian Haw and the inhabitants of the 'Democracy' village in Parliament Square shortly before their eviction.

The juxtaposition of such images against the timeless style of Gibran's text serves to tell the story; it becomes a series of memories, a travelogue and a portrait of both the people and the life of the fictional city of Orphalese, (a thinly disguised New York in Gibran's original), and thus a portrait of life at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Illness plagued Gibran for much of his adult life. He published *The Prophet* in 1923 and died eight years later, aged 48. There is a longing, and a lust for life, apparent in the language. In a summary of the book, after publication, Gibran wrote, "*The whole Prophet is saying one thing: 'you are far, far greater than you know -- and all is well.'*"

This was recorded by Mary Haskell, his benefactor and collaborator, with whom he shared his notes and early drafts of the book .\*\* Imagining Gibran and Haskell polishing the phrasing, with Haskell reading aloud, I decided to use a female voice as the narrator, in an edited version of the text. Thandie Newton found her own take on Haskell's voice, and her intimate reading has been retimed, and woven into a score for acoustic and electronic instruments, a technique first developed in *Black Sun (2005)*.

The film balances the three elements of image, music and Gibran's spoken text, and my intention is that the three engage in a counterpoint; sometimes closely knitted together, sometimes apart. At times the correspondence is more obvious, othertimes less so. It is for each viewer to make their own connections, and create their own interpretations.

### ***Gary Tarn, Wiltshire, 2011***

\* To those who need convincing of the beauty and clarity of Gibran's writing, consider :

'Your children are not your children. They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself...'. If you happen to need a description of the meaning of life in seventeen words, that pretty much nails it.

\*\* See 'Beloved Prophet', a book combining Haskell's journal and the published letters of Haskell and Gibran.

03.11.11 www.screendaily.com

**British film-maker Gary Tarn will be attending the upcoming Copenhagen International Documentary Festival (CPH:DOX) for the world premiere of his second feature *The Prophet*, a contemporary reworking of Kahlil Gibran's 1923 book.**

Based on Kahlil Gibran's book of poetic essays, the film follows Tarn's own journey across Beirut, Taiwan, Belgrade and Serbia over several years as he compiled documentary footage. The footage is accompanied by a voiceover from Thandie Newton and a score written by Tarn, who started out as a composer before moving into directing.

It is Tarn's second feature following *Black Sun*, a documentary about New York artist/film-maker Hughes de Montalembert who was blinded in a vicious attack, for which Tarn was nominated for a BAFTA in 2006. It was co-produced by Passion Pictures and was picked up by major buyers such as HBO in the US.

Tarn has plans to turn *The Prophet* into a live show accompanied by music, as well as a number of film projects in development.

**You started making the film back in 2008. How does it feel to be finally showing it to audiences?**

You lock yourself away and occasionally let a couple of people see it. And I've watched it on a projector. But it's not the same as sitting in a room with other people. If they really don't like it they will vote with their feet!

**How did you convince Thandie Newton to come onboard?**

We have a good mutual friend, he got a copy to her an early cut and she really loved it, although it took a while to find a gap in her schedule. I thought she had the right sensibility for it. It's one of those books that you will either know and you'll like or you won't. I had a feeling that she would be one of those people who would know and like it and that turned out to be correct.

**Do you think the film will hold appeal to people who haven't read the book?**

I'm not sure what the film will mean to someone who has no idea about the book. I am imagining people will be more drawn to it who have some kind of knowledge of the book. But I'm curious to know what people think. It will be an interesting experience. And I'm prepared for those people who think I haven't understood the book at all.

### **Why did you decide to create a contemporary interpretation of the book?**

It was just something that came as I was reading the book. I was given the book by a friend around for my birthday as few years ago, just after *Black Sun* and I was thinking about doing the next thing.

The book sat in my studio and one afternoon I was sitting there and idly picked it up. And although I probably had two copies on my shelf from the old days, I had never read it. I had a vague sense of what it was about, which is what a lot of people do have. I think it's probably one of the most widely owned unread books. A bit like *A Brief History Of Time*.

I had just spent four months on the set of *Children Of Men* with Alfonso Cuarón [Tarn made a documentary around it on issues of immigration]. My head was full of soldiers. I picked this up and as I was reading it I was thinking contemporary pictures rather than anything biblical.

The more I thought, the more I thought it could be an interesting idea, taking this very old fashioned language and putting it with modern contemporary images. I did a test, took some old footage I had lying about, did a little voice over and put some music to it and thought, this could actually work.

### **Was Lebanon the obvious place to start shooting?**

Gibran came from Lebanon. He left the copyright of his book to his village in Lebanon. As I read about him, I realised that it made sense to start the journey there. I was there eight months after the Hezbollah/Israeli stand off had happened. There was a lot of nervousness there. You could palpably feel it. But it's an incredible place. It is more of a party place than New York or anywhere I've ever been and then meanwhile there is this whole other side with soldiers everywhere.

### **How did you finance the film?**

I financed it with the profits from my first film. The plan was to make a film, put my own money into the first film and then to take money out and finance the next one, with the hope that once you've done a couple of films you are perhaps a bit more of a known quantity.

When you finance something yourself you can't just go and do trip after trip, which is why it's taken a few years. On the other hand, these days it's easier to make films the way I'm doing now. The cost of making films can be reduced, with the cameras and editing systems, it's actually feasible to go and make a film on your own, which was pretty difficult a few years ago.

It was literally just me and whoever I would find along the way. My favourite place to be is in the car. If you're moving it's like tracking. And if you're stationary you've got some kind of hide out.

### **The film is screening at a documentary festival, and yet you are keen not to pigeon hole it.**

I had a relationship with CPH:DOX from having won the Grand Prix there in 2006 [for *Black Sun*]. They sent me an interesting email, because they were discussing whether it was a documentary or not. They said it led to a lot of conversations and heated debates. They said they wanted to show it, but not in competition, because they didn't know which competition to put it in.

The difficulty with this film is that it pushes the "documentary" genre. I wouldn't really call it a documentary. You go to film festivals where you have to classify. You have to tick a genre. This doesn't fit into fiction or documentary, which implies artistic interpretation of true events. Putting a film in a box may make life a lot easier commercially but I'm not sure it makes films more interesting. But that's the kind of the world we are in, making films to see if they can become the next big thing as opposed to making films about something you really want to communicate.

**Did your BAFTA nomination for *Black Sun* open any doors?**

It didn't open any doors at all! I thought I might get the odd phone call, but it doesn't work like that. I'm sure it's subtly there when people want a bit of credibility. But I think that's movies. There are a lot of people out there making films. It's luck and who you bump into.

# PUBLISHING PERSPECTIVES

21 11 12 www.publishingperspectives.com

Khalil Gibran's *The Prophet*, published in 1923 by Alfred Knopf, has sold over nine million copies in the US alone — making Gibran the third bestseller poet ever, following Shakespeare and Lao-tzu. A work of “inspiration,” it has served as a spiritual guidebook for millions. Now the collection of 26 prose poems has been put to music and images in the form of a documentary by British filmmaker and composer Gary Tarn.

The [film](#), shot in Lebanon, New York, London, Milan and Serbia, is a series of brief sequences mirroring the book's structure. A nice touch is that the opening credits above the title *The Prophet* read “written by Kahlil Gibran.”

Just prior to the film's premier this month at the Copenhagen International Documentary Festival, Tarn spoke about what inspired him:

“I don't remember when I first encountered the book, but some years ago, given another copy by a friend, I happened to read it straight through. I was struck by the imagery and the poetry, and I wondered if it might be possible to make a film based on the text, a personal response to Gibran's prose.”

Tarn's first documentary, *Black Sun*, was nominated for a BAFTA in 2005; it retraced the experience of New York-based French artist Hughes de Montalembert who became blind after an assault. (De Montalembert's memoir, *Invisible*, was published by Atria Books in 2010.)