

# MTV DOCUMENTARY FILMS

Presents

A Hanashi Films, Cineric Creative & Star Sands Production  
In Association with Spark Features

# BLACK BOX DIARIES

Based on the International Bestseller



Directed by Shiori Ito

103 minutes • Japan/USA/UK • In Japanese with English subtitles



MoMA  
Doc Fortnight 2024  
Closing Night



## PRESS CONTACTS

New York / Regional - Susan Norget | [susan@norget.com](mailto:susan@norget.com)

Los Angeles - Nancy Willen | [nancywillen@acmepr.net](mailto:nancywillen@acmepr.net)

San Francisco - Karen Larsen | [karen@larsenassc.com](mailto:karen@larsenassc.com)

MTV Documentary Films - Kelly Andersen | [Kelly.Andersen@paramount.com](mailto:Kelly.Andersen@paramount.com)

## **LOGLINE**

Journalist Shiori Ito embarks on a courageous investigation of her own sexual assault in an improbable attempt to prosecute her high-profile offender. Her quest becomes a landmark case in Japan, exposing the country's outdated judicial and societal systems.

## **SHORT SYNOPSIS**

BLACK BOX DIARIES follows director and journalist Shiori Ito's courageous investigation of her own sexual assault in an improbable attempt to prosecute her high-profile offender. Unfolding like a thriller and combining secret investigative recordings, vérité shooting and emotional first-person video, Shiori's quest becomes a landmark case in Japan, exposing the country's desperately outdated judicial and societal systems.

## **LONG SYNOPSIS**

When 28-year-old aspiring journalist Shiori Ito goes public in May 2017 with her rape allegation against Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's closest journalist and biographer, she feels she has no other choice in order to change Japan's antiquated sexual assault laws. Her press conference shocks the public in a society where speaking up on such matters is considered shameful. Within days, Shiori is swept into the center of Japanese politics — the right wing views her as a threat to bring down the Abe government and the left hails her a hero for the same reason. Death threats, cyberbullying, and hate mail take Shiori into a downward spiral. When she files a civil case, the accused rages all-out war against her. Determined not to set a bad example for other victims, Shiori pushes forward with her case and resolves to publish a book about her experience.

Directed by herself with the most personal of material, BLACK BOX DIARIES captures Shiori's tumultuous, heart-wrenching, and ultimately triumphant journey, going behind the headlines to reveal what has been like to walk in her shoes. The documentary reveals the personal toll of a society's web of politics, media, and technology on the humanity of its individuals. Being both victim and journalist investigating her own case, the documentary shows that what Shiori did was not only to create social change but ultimately to keep herself alive.

## **DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT**

My name is Shiori Ito, and I am a journalist and filmmaker. In May 2017, I went public about being raped by Noriyuki Yamaguchi, a former Washington Bureau Chief for the Tokyo Broadcasting System known to be the closest journalist to then Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

In Japan, where speaking of rape remains taboo, only 4% of victims report their cases to police. Victims and those around them may be stigmatized and even ostracized from society. My family was against my actions. The police investigator, who had prepared to arrest Yamaguchi at Narita Airport upon returning from the US before receiving a last-minute call "from above," warned that I was ruining a journalism career just beginning. However, I felt a strong desire for the truth to be known, and to change Japanese society in order to prevent what happened to me from happening to more women.

Our film begins weeks before, the day I began recording video diaries on my iPhone, confessing my fear about what was to come. With only a vague idea of its future use, the material for this film began with a need to protect myself. In the previous year, after my case was suppressed by various levers of power in the Japanese system, I had secretly recorded conversations with the police and others. I became not only the victim but the investigator of my own case.

My coming forward shocked the public. There was a vicious backlash from the ultra-right, with an online campaign of disparaging posts and death threats, as well as everyday Japanese who picked apart my appearance and background. Why was my top blouse button undone at the press conference? This was evidence that I was a slut. A true Japanese would not speak of such shame.

Later, when a historic change in the Japanese rape law was passed, I felt my primary goal was accomplished and that I could return to a normal life. It was too late. I had become a hero, a villain, an icon – but I could not live with myself.

I pushed myself to the limit in shooting this documentary. Upon revisiting the hotel where I was raped, I felt the damage I was doing to myself might be too much. But at the same time, my desire to change society and tell this story kept me alive. Now, four years after winning the civil case, I can with more objectivity watch the scenes of my breaking down, passing moments of joy and normalcy, and absurd comedy in my novice investigator techniques – and to conceive how they can come together to form our film.

A black box is defined as a system whose internal workings are hidden or not readily understood. Japan is a land of black boxes, and I learned what happens in this society when you start opening them. Our film is not about seeking criminal justice against my perpetrator or about politics of the left and right. Rather, it is the story of one woman's experience – my black box, laid open for all to see.

## **LANGUAGES / TERRITORIES WHERE THE BOOK 'BLACK BOX' HAS BEEN PUBLISHED:**

Japanese, Korean, Simplified Chinese (Published in Mainland China), Traditional Chinese (Published in Taiwan), French, Italian, Swedish, US, English, UK English, Slovakian, Polish

## ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

Shiori Ito began accumulating the materials for BLACK BOX DIARIES as a means of protection, recording secret audio of the police and filming herself confessional style on her iPhone at home. As a journalist, she had an instinct that they might become valuable in telling her own story, though she had not defined yet in what medium. Over the years, between the rape in April 2015 and her civil case victory in December 2019, Shiori relied upon her creative partner, Swedish journalist and filmmaker Hanna Aqvilin, and the support of videographer friends to shoot her activities vérité-style while continuing to film herself confessional-style with an iPhone and diligently keep up her diary. She was also filmed by media outlets such as BBC and NHK, with agreements she would later be able to access the footage. It is these materials which, though varying in style and format, together comprise a viscerally raw, shocking, and ultimately human and convincing account of this period of five years in Shiori's life. In late 2020, one year after the civil court victory, she felt ready to tell her own story in the form of a feature documentary.

In approaching BLACK BOX DIARIES, Shiori's intention first and foremost has been to allow this powerful record of events gathered in real-time to form the spine of the film; it proceeds mostly chronologically and explicitly from the first-person POV of the director/subject. Although those around Shiori were re-interviewed to gain further context and understanding, no images or even audio from these interviews appear in the final film. Rather, information necessary to follow the story both for Japanese and international audiences is woven into the timeline using subtle techniques such as images from Shiori's diary and from contemporaneous media. Shiori also collaborated with Japanese visual artist Keke Shiratama to create a new layer of abstract imagery representing her inner experience. To enhance the immersive experience of BLACK BOX DIARIES, the film has a soundscape at the border of sound and music with an original score by Mark degli Antoni and sound design by Andrew Tracy.

When this film production started, Japan's rape laws had remained the same for the last 110 years, with a shorter minimum sentence for rape than theft. Rape rarely existed according to statistics, and culturally and structurally, sexual violence was not treated as a serious problem. Rape was provable only by severe physical violence or threats, not by lack of consent. The taboo and the complications involved in addressing the topic existed on all levels of society, and therefore most victims rarely came forward with sexual assault allegations. The fear of having to relive the event and the stigma led to only 4% (some studies even say as low as 1%) of sexual assault survivors reporting the crime. The chances of a female police officer being assigned to the case were very rare — less than 8% of the Japanese police force are women. When going to the police, victims often had to re-enact their incident with life-sized dolls. Tokyo only had one rape crisis center for city with a 14 million population — a single phone line with two staff members sharing the work burden. This is the society Shiori Ito faced when she decided to report a rape, and BLACK BOX DIARIES is the story of hard won change, albeit not nearly enough yet.

## **BIOS**

### **Shiori Ito – Director (Producer/Camera)**

Shiori Ito is a journalist, writer, and documentary filmmaker. Her primary focus is gender-based human rights issues. She co-founded Hanashi Films, a Tokyo and London-based production company that has collaborated with NHK, BBC, and Al Jazeera, amongst others.

In 2017, Shiori wrote the book “Black Box,” based on her own experience of rape. The book reveals the sexism in Japan’s society and institutions and won the Free Press Association of Japan Award for Best Journalism in 2018. It has been translated into a number of languages. In 2020 she was listed as one of the 100 most influential people in the world by Time magazine.

BLACK BOX DIARIES is her feature documentary debut.

### **Ema Ryan Yamazaki – Editor**

Raised in Osaka, Japan, by a Japanese mother and British father, Ema grew up navigating between Japanese and Western cultures.

After graduating from New York University, she became the assistant to renowned documentary filmmaker Sam Pollard. As an editor, her work has been shown on outlets such as HBO, PBS, CNN, and numerous festivals around the world. She edited and co-produced CLASS DIVIDE, directed by Marc Levin, which won the Grand Prize at DOC NYC in 2014.

In 2017, Ema’s first feature documentary, MONKEY BUSINESS: THE ADVENTURES OF CURIOUS GEORGE’S CREATORS, was released worldwide by The Orchard, after raising over \$186,000 on Kickstarter. It premiered at the LA Film Festival and won the Audience Award at the Nantucket Film Festival. It was later featured on the Criterion Channel.

In 2019, Ema’s second feature documentary about the phenomenon of high school baseball in Japan, KOSHIEN: JAPAN’S FIELD OF DREAMS, premiered at DOC NYC. In 2020, the film aired on ESPN, and was released theatrically in Japan. It later became a New York Times recommendation for international streaming and was featured on the Criterion Channel.

In 2023, Ema completed her third feature documentary, THE MAKING OF A JAPANESE, about Japanese elementary schooling. It premiered to critical acclaim at the Tokyo International Film Festival.

Ema edits her own work, and uses her unique storytelling perspective as an insider and outsider in Japan and in the US. She currently splits her base between Tokyo and New York.

## **Eric Nyari – Producer**

Based in Tokyo and New York, Eric is President of Cineric Creative and International Representative for renowned film restoration house Cineric, Inc.

Eric has produced numerous films in Japan, including director Amir Naderi's CUT, which was the Opening Film of the 2011 Venice Film Festival's Orizzonti section. He produced MONTE, an Italy/USA/French co-production, which premiered at the 2016 Venice Film Festival with Naderi receiving the Glory to the Filmmaker Award. In documentary, he produced the critically acclaimed portrait RYUICHI SAKAMOTO: CODA, (Venice 2017) and companion concert film, RYUICHI SAKAMOTO: ASYNC LIVE AT THE PARK AVENUE ARMORY (Berlin 2018). Eric has managed 4K restorations of Japanese classics such as Kenji Mizoguchi's UGETSU with Martin Scorsese's Film Foundation, as well as Yasujiro Ozu's LATE SPRING.

In recent years, he has produced Yoichiro Okutani's ODORIKO, which won two awards at Cinema du Reel in 2021; Takeshi Fukunaga's AINU MOSIR, which was awarded a Special Jury Mention in Tribeca's International Narrative Competition in 2020, and Fukunaga's MOUNTAIN WOMAN (Tokyo International 2022); Ema Ryan Yamazaki's KOSHIEN: JAPAN'S FIELD OF DREAMS (DOC NYC 2019) and THE MAKING OF A JAPANESE (Tokyo International 2023) . He recently served as a Producer on director Neo Sora's RYUICHI SAKAMOTO | OPUS, which premiered at the 2023 Venice and New York Film Festival, and Sora's upcoming narrative debut, HAPPYEND, which will premiere at Venice 2024.

## **Hanna Aqvilin – Producer**

Hanna is a Swedish journalist and documentary producer/director. She spent several years at the British BAFTA-winning production company Archer's Mark, serving as a producer on numerous award-winning films, including BEING A HUMAN PERSON, an intimate portrait of the world-renowned film director, Roy Andersson, and HOLD YOUR BREATH: THE ICE DIVE, which is currently streaming on Netflix.

Her producer credits include for the BBC, Al Jazeera, Nat Geo, and Netflix, and prior to this, Hanna worked as a reporter for the Swedish public broadcaster, SVT.

Hanna's projects are often about social issues, women's empowerment and mental health, and use intimate and humanizing storytelling. She started to work on this feature documentary together with Shiori Ito back in 2017, and together they are running the production company, Hanashi Films.

## **Mitsunobu Kawamura – Executive Producer (In Memory of)**

Mitsunobu Kawamura was President of Japanese production and distribution company Star Sands until his passing in 2022. Hailed as a pioneer for his politically challenging content that reached mainstream audiences, Kawamura oversaw the production of a number of artistically and commercially successful films. In 2020, his production of THE JOURNALIST won the Best Film, Best

Actor, and Best Actress awards at the Japan Academy Awards. He also Executive Produced a parallel documentary on the same subject, I-DOCUMENTARY OF THE JOURNALIST, directed by Tatsuya Mori.

### **Mark degli Antoni - Original Score**

Mark degli Antoni is a film composer and keyboard performer. He is a co-founder of the Warner Bros. band Soul Coughing.

Mark's notable film scores include Werner Herzog's INTO THE ABYSS and Matt Ruskin's CROWN HEIGHTS, featuring LaKeith Stanfield, which won the Audience Award at 2017 Sundance Film Festival. He has scored films for Roger Ross Williams, Maya Daisy Hawke and Sarah Adina Smith, among many others.

In addition to Soul Coughing, Mark has performed and recorded with David Byrne, Laurie Anderson, Angelique Kidjo, and Redman, among others. He is a Fellow of the Sundance Film Institute and a Cinema Eye Honors Best Score Nominee.

## **CREDITS**

### **Directed by**

Shiori Ito

### **Produced by**

Eric Nyari  
Hanna Aqvilin  
Shiori Ito

### **Edited by**

Ema Ryan Yamazaki

### **Camera by**

Hanna Aqvillin  
Yuta Okamura  
Shiori Ito  
Yuichiro Otsuka

### **Abstract Imagery**

Keke Shiratama

### **Color**

Fumiro Sato

### **Consulting Editor**

Maya Daisy Hawke

### **Co-Editor**

Mariko Montpetite

### **Original Score**

Mark degli Antoni

### **Sound Design and Mix**

Andrew Tracy

### **Executive Producers**

Robina Riccitiello  
Josh Peters

### **Executive Producers**

Nina L. Diaz  
Liza Burnett Fefferman



**Executive Produced by**  
Mitsunobu Kawamura

**Co-Producers**  
Takashi Shinomiya  
Ryo Yukizane  
Ryo Nagai

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