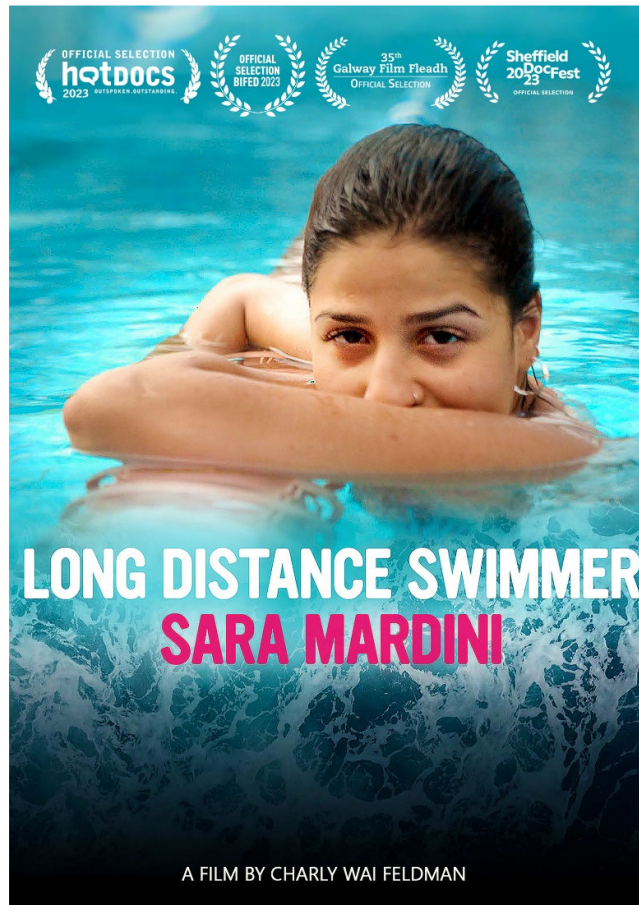


LONG DISTANCE SWIMMER SARA MARDINI



A FILM BY
CHARLY WAI FELDMAN

88 mins / 2023 / English, Arabic, Greek, German, English Subtitles / Germany, UK



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AWARDS AND FILM FESTIVALS

Hot Docs Canadian International Documentary Festival, Canada
Sheffield DocFest International Documentary Festival, UK
Galway Film Fleadh International Film Festival
BIFED - Bozcaada International Festival of Ecological Documentary, Turkey
Raindance Film Festival, UK
Films for Future Festival, Switzerland
On the Move Festival, Germany
ReFrame Film Festival, Canada
World Community Film Festival, Canada
Millenium International Documentary Film Festival, Belgium
Jeonju International Film Festival, Korea

SYNOPSIS

At 20, Sara was already famous. She fled Syria in 2015 with her younger sister Yusra. When their boat broke down as they were crossing the sea to Greece, Sara and Yusra and two others jumped into the waves and swam for three and a half hours in open water to stop their dinghy from capsizing, saving the lives of everyone on board. Their journey made headlines around the world, and is dramatized in a Netflix film called *The Swimmers*. Our story begins when the fictionalized drama ends. Sara has spent three years rescuing refugees on the same journey that made her famous, but she was suddenly arrested on August 2018. Sara was accused by Greek authorities of running a criminal enterprise and charged with “international espionage and people smuggling”. If convicted, she faces up to 25 years in prison and the end of her humanitarian career. Banned from Lesbos and waiting for news of the trial, she lives a surreal existence in Berlin.

DIRECTORS' STATEMENT

The news of Sara Mardini's arrest in August 2018 came as a shock. I was familiar with her incredible backstory, and could only imagine what it took to go back to Lesvos to help others facing the same journey she had once risked her life on. How was one of Europe's most celebrated refugees now sitting in a Greek maximum-security prison, accused of being part of a smuggling operation, a money launderer and a spy? There was an overwhelming sense of injustice and a desire to find out what had happened.

Sara was released on bail after over three months in prison. When we first met, she wore a T-shirt that read 'The Art of Eye Contact' and radiated an intense, vibrant energy. I was drawn to how outspoken, confident and charismatic she appeared, seemingly unshackled from the labels that people tried to use to define her. As a child athlete specialized in long distance swimming, she was trained to persevere and look forward, not back. But the threat of a trial and 20-year-prison sentence left her feeling trapped, in limbo, like a lion in a cage. In between her words there was a vulnerability, layers of trauma and a very relatable search for a home.

There was also the wider political context. There was a palpable shift from 2015, when Sara and Yusra's escape from Syria and journey to Germany was celebrated across the world, to 2018 when authorities in many nations in Europe turned against refugees and those who try to help them. By 2019, over 150 people were facing criminal accusations for helping refugees, while the number of people dying in the Mediterranean was rising at an alarming rate. This felt very personal to me, as the great-granddaughter of Russian Jews who fled the Bolshevik revolution in the early 1900s and the granddaughter of Hong Kong refugees forced to flee during World War II. My great-uncle, a survivor of the Holocaust, only survived because he was part of a small minority of children on ships who were given permission to dock in the US during the war. I have intimately come to understand how small acts of solidarity can make the difference between surviving and thriving for displaced people building a new life.

Living with the fear of imprisonment every day is a psychological struggle for survival which is illustrated in this film. Over four years after meeting Sara, it has become clear that Sara, Seán and their co-accused are pawns in a bigger political game. Amnesty International called the case 'farical, unfair and baseless' while Human Rights watch called it 'politically motivated,' yet they are still facing serious criminal accusations and a 20-year prison sentence. Despite the bleak

political landscape, this film is also a tribute to the fighter in Sara, the long distance swimmer who continues to inspire people to speak up for what they believe in.

Charly Wai Feldman

DIRECTOR BIOGRAPHY

Charly Wai Feldman is a writer, producer and documentary filmmaker based in London UK. She has a background producing current affairs films, many with international distribution. Her work includes *The Talwars* - a four-part HBO series, and *This is Exile: Diaries of Child Refugees*, which premiered at IDFA and won the Amnesty International Award in 2016. More recently, Charly produced the climate change musical road trip documentary *the Great Green Wall*, and created a series called *Inside the Cryptokingdom* exploring the world of cryptocurrencies and blockchain technology. *Long Distance Swimmer: Sara Mardini* is her first feature documentary, shot over nearly four years following former Syrian swimmer and activist Sara Mardini after she is accused of human smuggling, money laundering and espionage. Charly is the recipient of the 2020 Malik Bendjelloul Memorial Fund, has served as a jury member for Royal Television Society and is a member of Brown Girls Doc Mafia.

PRODUCTION CREDITS

A film by
Charly Wai Feldman

With

In order of appearance

Sara Mardini
Joelle Berge
Yusra Mardini
Zacharias Kesses
Mervat Al Aswad
Seán Binder
Costas Georgiades
Dr Florian Becker
Shahed Mardini
Luca Bucken
Fanny Binder
Claudia Drost
Sven Spannekrebs
Anna Benedictsson
Caoimhe Butterly
Haris Petsikos

Written and Directed by
Charly Wai Feldman

Editor and Story Consultant
Franziska von Berlepsch

Director of Photography
Zamarin Wahdat

Line Producer
Izzy Hughes-Morgan

Producers
Antje Boehmert
Anna von Dziembowska
Daniel Druhora
Drake Burnette

Sound Recording
Patrick Dadaczynski
Gregory Oke

Music Composition
K River Records
Laurens von Oswald
Leopold Faerberboeck

Music Supervisor
Laurens von Oswald
Leopold Faerberboeck

Sound Design and Mix
Stanislaw Milkowski

Edit Consultants
Ronald Rist
Cătălin Cristutiu

Colorist
Ronney Afortu

Graphics
Ky Moodie

Archive Research
Izzy Hughes-Morgan
Elizabeth Klinc

Laegerdorf Swimming Unit

The underwater scenes were filmed with the help of a professional swimmer.

Swimmer
Joelle Berge

1st Assistant Director
Joachim Bornemann

Underwater Camera and Drone
Andres Prado

Assistant Camera
Kirsi Andresen
Hannah Breitenfeld

Camera team, Grips and Gaffers
Burkhard Fuchs
Florian Hoff
Jens Mackeldry
Ole Meißner
Jo Schmidt

Hair and Makeup
Monika Huebert

Behind the Scenes
Michael Eilers

Catering
Michael & Steffi Thoms

Additional Cinematography

Yassir Benchelah

Janis Brod

Shane Caffrey

Dara McDonagh

Shivani Hassard

Fynn Stoldt

Ivan Wood

Trailer Editor

Tom Bober

Transcription and Translation

Haneen Aldasooqi

Emma Dahmani

Amira Zarari

Dina Aboul Hosn

Majid Chatti

Abdulhay Altoron

Natasa Papanikolaou

Production Interns

Amélie Janda

Jakob Faber

Philipp Fischer

Additional Sound Recording

Oskar von Gilgenheimb

Enrique Cuesta

Production Assistant

Nele Huff

Anastasia Lukovnikova

Festival Consultant

Brigid O'Shea

Subtitles

Babelfisch

Insurance

Thomas Moor

Howden Caninienberg

Travel Agent

Jochen Simon

Zeit zum Reisen

Archival Footage and Stills Courtesy of
Footage of Sara Mardini 2015-2016 from 'She is Syria' - Shelley Cheung Claudon

'Another News Story' – Gallivant Film/Wislocki Films

Associative Press Archive - Barack Obama Presidential Library - Burda GmbH –
Civil Fleet e.V. - Envato Market - European Council Newsroom - Getty Images –
International Film Festival and Forum on Human Rights (FIFDH) - Kobalt Productions
MySwimPro - One Young World - Pond5 – Shutterstock - Sport1 - TEDx –
Tom Brada - UNHCR

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Sophie Fiennes
David Freeman
Simon Hipkins
Zacharias Kesses
Catherine Le Goff
Francesco Leali
Tom Mangan

Shahed Mardini
Zara Meerza
Jane Mote
Clio Papapantoleon
Haris Petsikos
Jane Ray
Knut Schmitz
Laja Schutzer-Weissmann
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Paula Vaccaro
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Gudrun Hanke-El Ghomri
Simone Reuter
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Anas Abdelwahab

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Anna von Dziembowska
Daniel Druhora
Charly Wai Feldman
Drake Burnette

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EURODOC
Assembly Lab at Open City Documentary Festival
First Cut Lab

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Sheffield Doc/Fest - Meet Market
DOK Leipzig - Co-Pro Market

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