

sirens

سيرانز



A FILM BY RITA BAGHDADI

USA / Lebanon

Arabic & English with English subtitles

TRT 78 minutes

sirensdocumentary.com

Press Contact

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LOGLINE

On the outskirts of Beirut, Lilas and Shery, co-founders and guitarists of the Middle East's first all-female metal band, wrestle with friendship, sexuality and destruction in their pursuit of becoming thrash metal rock stars.

SYNOPSIS

On the outskirts of Beirut, Lilas and her thrash metal bandmates, Shery, Maya, Alma and Tatyana (Slave to Sirens), have big dreams but few opportunities. When the band's appearance at a UK music festival isn't the life-changer they had hoped for, Lilas comes home to Lebanon on the brink of collapse. At the same time, the complicated friendship between Lilas and her fellow guitarist Shery starts to fracture. The future of her band, her country and her dreams now all at stake, Lilas faces a crossroad. She must decide what kind of leader she will be, not only for her band, but also as a young woman struggling to define herself in Lebanon, a region of the Middle East as complex as each of the Sirens themselves.

LONG SYNOPSIS

Headstrong 23-year-old guitarist Lilas Mayassi lives with her mom and younger brother on the outskirts of Beirut. By day, Lilas teaches music to kids. By night, she's trying to keep her thrash metal band together. And she's secretly falling for a young woman living across the border in Syria.

Growing up in the shadow of their parents' civil war, Lilas and her bandmates, Shery, Maya, Alma and Tatiana (Slave to Sirens), have big dreams but few opportunities. After being discovered in a major music magazine, the Sirens get invited to the UK to play Glastonbury, the world's largest music festival. But the show isn't a life-changer and Lilas comes home to Lebanon on the brink of collapse. She starts taking her frustrations out on her band, specifically Shery, the enigmatic co-founder and lead guitarist with whom Lilas shares a hushed past.

As the revolution takes a turn and Beirut ignites into flames, the complicated friendship between Lilas and Shery begins to fracture. Suddenly, Shery quits the band and they are left without their lead guitarist. With the future of her band, her country and her dreams now at stake, Lilas faces a

crossroad. She must decide what kind of leader she will be, not only for her band, but also as a young woman struggling to define herself in Lebanon, a region of the Middle East as complex as each of the Sirens themselves.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Everyone I have ever loved has been a musician.

Meeting Lilas was a lot like love at first sight. Even though we come from different backgrounds,—Lilas from the mountains of Lebanon, and me between Maryland and Morocco—I recognized a lot of my younger self in Lilas. Talking for hours online, we bonded over an appreciation for heavy music, our obsession for purple, and how we both had a tendency to be our own worst enemy.

Someone once told me, "don't try to change the world, make a film that will change your life." That certainly was the case making *Sirens*. Growing up in post 9/11 America, I was deeply affected by the way Arab characters were treated in the films I saw. They were demonized and belittled, and I couldn't find a girl like me anywhere. So when I met the the band Slave to Sirens, I was drawn to the opportunity to make the kind of film that I craved growing up. A film where Arab women could be the stars of their own story, not merely the subplot in someone else's. Where Arab women could curse, scream, thrash and talk openly about sexuality without being sexualized. I knew the best way to challenge Western expectations of what it's like being a young woman in the Middle East today was to simply feature them like everyone else: human, full of dreams and fueled by desire.

Lilas's story, while incredibly unique, conveys universal themes of friendship, falling in love and the struggle to find your identity. Lilas and Shery both gave so much of themselves for this film because they want to make a difference in the lives of young people in the Middle East, and around the world, who are struggling with their own identities. I believe this film can be a powerful way to do that and I hope audiences can find a reflection of themselves in the *Sirens*.

BIOS

Rita Baghdadi - Director, Producer and Cinematographer

Rita Baghdadi is an award-winning, Moroccan-American documentary filmmaker. Her bold, character-driven work has been supported by Sundance, Tribeca, Netflix, HBO, Film Independent and the International Documentary Association. Rita got her start as a cinematographer, filming verité documentaries such as *Served Like A Girl*, which The Hollywood Reporter recognized for its "unfussy intimacy." Rita's feature documentary directorial debut, *My Country No More*, was awarded Best Feature at the 2018 Big Sky Film Festival. The film was broadcast on PBS's Independent Lens and is now streaming on Amazon. Her documentary *City Rising* won the LA-area Emmy award for Best Social Issue Film and is being used as a tool for activism around housing inequality. Rita is the co-founder of Lady & Bird Films and is a member of Brown Girls Doc Mafia. When she is not in the field, she is an active mentor dedicated to empowering women and girls of color through documentary film training. Her latest feature documentary, *Sirens*, is premiering in competition at the 2022 Sundance Film Festival.

Camilla Hall - Producer

Camilla Hall produces films with narratives that simply have to be told, including *Sirens* (Sundance 2022) and *Circus of Books* (Netflix 2021). She is otherwise focused on directing. Camilla is currently directing *Kingdom of Dreams*, a new documentary series produced by Misfits Entertainment. She recently completed post-production on *Subject*, co-directed with Jennifer Tiexiera. Her first film, *Copwatch*, world-premiered at the 2017 Tribeca Festival and her second, *Garenne*, was commissioned by BBC Storyville and Arte. She is a co-founder, along with Rita Baghdadi and Jennifer Tiexiera, of Lady & Bird Films, a female-run production company. Camilla is an alumni of the Sundance Financing Intensive and represented by Stern & Wild. She splits her time between London and Los Angeles.

Grace Zahrah - Editor

Grace Zahrah is a Lebanese-American artist, woodworker and emerging documentary film editor on the rise. The first feature documentary Grace edited was *Copwatch* (nominated for Best Documentary, Tribeca Film Festival 2017). The film sold to Gunpowder and Sky and is now streaming on multiple VOD platforms. Graduating from Carleton College in Minnesota, Grace spent her undergraduate years making short documentaries in Lebanon and Jordan. In the past few years Grace has edited three feature documentaries: *Scab Vendor* about a celebrity tattoo artist; *Stay*, an intimate, character-driven documentary about the Los Angeles foster care system, and, most recently, *Sirens*, about the first all-female metal band in the Middle East, which will have its world premiere at the 2022 Sundance Film Festival.

Tatiana el Dahdah - Location Sound / Co-Producer

Born and raised in Beirut, Tatiana el Dahdah graduated in 2013 from the UK's National Film & Television School. She has recorded sound for many documentary films including *We Intend to Cause Havoc*, about the Zambian rock band Witch; *The Man Behind the Microphone*, about the godfather of Tunisian music; and, most recently, *Sirens*.

Para One - Composer

Standing at many crossroads between cinema and music, Jean-Baptiste de Laubier, aka Para One, is a multi-faceted artist with too many skills for classification. Starting out as a producer, first in hip-hop then in electronic music through his own music label Marble, he branched out early on to create his own solo albums "Epiphanie," "Passion" and "Club." Besides being a prominent composer, Para One has produced for various artists such as Birdy Nam Nam and more recently Meryem Aboulouafa's debut album. His work has been recognized in the movie industry through the writing of several original soundtracks, notably for French director Celine Sciamma's *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*, which received Best Screenplay at the Cannes Film Festival 2019 and 11 nominations at the 2020 César Awards. He is also director and producer of his own numerous short movies.

Danielle Renfrew Behrens, Natasha Lyonne, Maya Rudolph (Animal Pictures) - Executive Producers

Maya Rudolph and Natasha Lyonne launched Animal Pictures in 2018 with veteran independent producer Danielle Renfrew Behrens. Animal is currently shooting AppleTV+'s untitled half-hour comedy series starring Rudolph, created by Emmy winners Alan Yang and Matt Hubbard. Concurrently, Animal is in prep on Rian Johnson's one-hour mystery series *Poker Face* for Peacock with Lyonne serving as EP and star, and in post-production on both the second season of *Russian Doll* for Netflix and Hulu's *Untitled Sammi Cohen Feature* starring Rowan Blanchard and Auli'i Cravalho.

Brynn Mooser, Kathryn Everett (XTR) - Executive Producers

[XTR](#) is a global nonfiction entertainment studio. XTR works with outstanding creators to produce, distribute, finance and develop documentary films, series, and podcasts for all platforms. With a focus on audience appeal and a commitment to artistry, the award-winning studio uses a data-driven strategy to inform all phases of the filmmaking process. Since its inception in 2019, XTR has produced and financed over 80 documentary features and series. In 2021, XTR films received more awards nominations than any other studio working in nonfiction. XTR - based on a true story.

CREDITS

DIRECTED BY

Rita Baghdadi

PRODUCED BY

Rita Baghdadi

Camilla Hall

EDITED BY

Grace Zahrah

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Rita Baghdadi

LOCATION SOUND BY

Tatiana el Dahdah

ORIGINAL SCORE BY

Para One

SUPERVISING EDITOR

Lindsay Utz

CO-PRODUCERS

Tatiana el Dahdah

Jeremiah Hammerling

Jennifer Tiexiera

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS

Danielle Renfrew Behrens

Natasha Lyonne

Maya Rudolph

Cindy Holland

John Boccoardo

Derek Esplin

Kathryn Everett

Bryn Mooser

Dave Pell

CO-EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS

Jyoti Sarda

Tatiana Maxwell

Thalia Mavros

Mona Panchal

Alex Lieberman

Gary Lieberman

FEATURING

Lilas Mayassi

Shery Bechara

Maya Khairallah

Alma Doumani

Tatyana Boughaba

SIRENS is an Animal Pictures, Lady & Bird and Endless Eye Production, in association with XTR.

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