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Press Notes

NASRIN

Producer: Marcia S. Ross | Director, Producer, Writer: Jeff Kaufman

“I URGE YOU TO SEE THIS TIMELY AND IMPORTANT FILM!” - Margaret Atwood



VIRTUAL CINEMA IN NORTH AMERICA DECEMBER 18

YEAR 2020 | COUNTRY USA | RUN TIME 92 MINUTES

Website: www.nasrinfilm.com

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NASRIN

PRESS NOTES

LOGLINE

Secretly filmed in Iran: an immersive portrait of the world's most honored human rights activist and political prisoner, Nasrin Sotoudeh, and of the remarkably resilient Iranian women's rights movement.

SYNOPSIS

Secretly filmed in Iran by women and men who risked arrest to make this film. An immersive portrait of the world's most honored human rights activist and political prisoner, attorney Nasrin Sotoudeh, and of Iran's remarkably resilient women's rights movement. In the courts and on the streets, Nasrin has long fought for the rights of women, children, religious minorities, journalists and artists, and those facing the death penalty. In the midst of filming, Nasrin was arrested in June 2018 for representing women who were protesting Iran's mandatory hijab law. She was sentenced to 38 years in prison, plus 148 lashes. Featuring acclaimed filmmaker Jafar Panahi, Nobel Peace Prize laureate Shirin Ebadi, and journalist Ann Curry. Narrated by Academy Award-winner Olivia Colman.

FILMMAKERS' STATEMENT

We started work on this documentary around the same time the current president proposed a Muslim travel ban: May 2016. That policy came out of a cynical political effort to demonize Islam and push for conflict with Iran. It's based on a stereotype that is not only wrong, but it misses that fact that there is much we can learn from the people and culture of that often-misunderstood country. As Ann Curry says in *NASRIN*, "There's an incredible difference between the Iranian people and the Iranian leadership." The same could be said about America.

We wanted to tell Nasrin Sotoudeh's story because she embodies a commitment to democracy, justice, and political courage; the power of women to shape society; and a deep conviction that people of all faiths and backgrounds deserve equal opportunity and protection. She is also a fierce, funny, and resilient individual, supported at home and in her work by her loving husband, and she has repeatedly put herself at risk to serve others. As we were filming, Nasrin was arrested in June 2018 for defending women who protested Iran's mandatory head-scarf law by publicly removing their hijabs. She was sentenced to decades in prison and dozens of lashes, but she continues to challenge the authorities from the confines of her cell. Often called "The Nelson Mandela of Iran," Nasrin has become an international symbol of human rights, resistance, and hope. All this makes her a great subject for a film, and an inspiring role model for people everywhere.

- producer / director Jeff Kaufman and producer Marcia S. Ross

NASRIN PRESS NOTES

Q&A WITH PRODUCER / DIRECTOR JEFF KAUFMAN AND PRODUCER MARCIA S. ROSS

1. How did this film come about? How did the idea originate? What inspired you?

Prior to *NASRIN* Jeff Kaufman and Marcia Ross produced five documentaries together on a diverse range of subjects: *EVERY ACT OF LIFE* (about groundbreaking Tony-winning playwright and LGBTQ activist Terrence McNally), *40 MILLION: THE STRUGGLE FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN IRAN* (a short film for *Time Magazine*), *THE STATE OF MARRIAGE* (on the unsung women who launched the marriage equality movement), *THE SAVOY KING* (how Swing Jazz in 1930s Harlem broke the color barrier in American music and dance), and *FATHER JOSEPH* (about faith and economic justice through women's empowerment in Haiti). We come from different backgrounds but share a love of character-based storytelling about individuals who bring people together and push society forward.

Jeff hosted / produced a daily radio talk show, worked as a journalist, contributed cartoons and illustrations to *The New Yorker*, *The Los Angeles Times*, and *The New York Times*, and wrote / illustrated several children's books. Marcia started out in the theatre, became a film and television casting director (*thirtysomething*, *Clueless*, *Romy & Michelle's High School Reunion*, *The Princess Diaries*), and was head of casting Walt Disney feature films and Warner Brothers Television. Jeff and Marcia were married midway through making *EVERY ACT OF LIFE*.

In 2011, Jeff did a short documentary with Amnesty International about the persecution of the Baha'i Faith in Iran (*EDUCATION UNDER FIRE*). He was deeply moved by the stories he heard of many Muslim men and women putting themselves at great risk to help their Baha'i neighbors. That project involved working with people inside and outside Iran, and it also deepened an appreciation for the country's rich and diverse culture. Over the years the idea of expanding on these concerns from another perspective kept coming back.

Nasrin was raised in a conservative Muslim family, but she was taught to respect people of other faiths. As an attorney and activist, she has been a courageous champion of the Baha'i community and other religious minorities in Iran, while also fighting for the rights of women, children, journalists, artists, and those facing the death penalty. In 2016 we reached out to Nasrin through mutual friends to ask if she'd be interested in a documentary about her life and work. Despite the separation of distance and history, we felt a quick personal connection to Nasrin and to her equally remarkable husband, Reza Khandan. They have a daughter and a son who have seen both their parents imprisoned numerous times, but who grew up in a happy, surprisingly "normal" family.

Nasrin and Reza shared our interest in having this immersive profile of Nasrin also be a personal way to tell the story of Iran's remarkably resilient women's rights movement, and to connect people around the world to a largely unseen side of this often-misunderstood country. Nasrin has a passion for the arts (she writes poems and makes collages for her friends), and she allowed our camera-people to follow her to a modern art gallery, a bookshop, a puppet-making party, and a production of Ariel Dorfman's play *Death and the Maiden* in a Tehran theatre that looks like it's in Greenwich Village. This is not the Iran you usually see on the news.

Because of Jeff's past work on Iran, we weren't able to travel to that country. We are deeply grateful to the brave Iranian women and men who repeatedly risked arrest while filming. They take us with Nasrin and Reza to political demonstrations, into Revolutionary Court, inside Tehran's notorious Evin Prison, and in meetings with clients who face years in prison for peaceful political protests. Everyone featured in the film, including acclaimed filmmaker Jafar Panahi, participated (and signed a

release) knowing that this could place them in jeopardy. It's humbling and motivating to work with people who are willing to put themselves on the line for freedom and justice. Nasrin is a universal role model for human rights, and so is everyone in Iran who contributed to this film.

In June 2018, midway through our filming, Nasrin was arrested for defending women who protested Iran's mandatory head-scarf law by publicly removing their hijabs. She was sentenced to decades in prison and dozens of lashes, but she continues to challenge the authorities from the confines of her cell. In August 2020 she launched a 46-day hunger strike to protest health conditions and Covid-19 infections in Iran hospitals. She gathered worldwide support and conditions to demonstrate why she has been called "The Nelson Mandela of Iran."

Now here we are with a documentary and a campaign calling for Nasrin's freedom. Reza wrote, "It is so exciting to talk about this film that was made through the help and dedication of many people after years of much and often unimaginable difficulties. Besides telling the story of 'our lives' and many others like us, the making of this film could also be a story on its own." *NASRIN* wouldn't exist without the essential contributions of editor Asher Bingham, film score composer Tyler Strickland, narrator Olivia Colman, the composers of the original end credit song Lynn Ahrens and Stephen Flaherty (with lyrics based on Nasrin's letters to her children from prison), the performer of that song, singer Angélique Kidjo, and so many others.

In an editorial headlined "In praise of Nasrin Sotoudeh," *The Guardian* wrote, "As a lawyer, Nasrin Sotoudeh spoke out for the rights of her imprisoned clients and other women but was then banged up herself – the price she paid for telling the truth. Long the voice of the voiceless in Iran, Nasrin requires every ounce of her extraordinary courage to avoid being silenced herself." We feel privileged to amplify Nasrin's voice and the voice of those she represents. Like Nelson Mandela, she speaks to the world.

2. How long did it take to make the film? From concept to finish.

2016 to 2020 from idea to completion.

3. Why did you make this film?

The first time we met we spoke about the films of Hal Ashby and Michael Ritchie, and some of our favorite movies, directors, and actors. That conversation was about narrative films, but we approach our documentaries with the same interest in compelling characters and emotional storytelling. We want the audience to understand our subjects' struggles and motivations, and the world they have to navigate in. For *NASRIN* specifically, we were also responding to an assault on democracy, religious tolerance and women's rights in this country, and the attempt by mostly conservative forces to demonize the people of Iran. Iranian politicians use the same kind of rhetoric against the United States. Before she was arrested, Nasrin said, "Hard-liners in the United States and Iran empower each other." The subject of our last film, playwright Terrence McNally, passionately believed in the power of the arts to move society forward. Nasrin agrees. In a 2013 speech she made right after her first release from prison Nasrin said, "The arts are something I have always envied. Because they can do something that no other effort can. Art is the best way to ditch the dictator. Art changes the rules of the game with dictators." Thanks to the contribution of many people inside and outside Iran, we want this film to be part of that tradition of art creating change and understanding.

4. Share a story about filming; anything that you found interesting along the way with your filming journey.

During our trip to film interviews with Shirin Ebadi in London, Taghi Rahmani in Paris, and Mansoureh Shojaee in The Hague I was profoundly impacted by their stories of having fled Iran, a country they love, leaving family and friends behind, knowing that they could never return without facing arrest and imprisonment - and possibly torture. I came to understand, during the editing of the film, that Nasrin had some idea that her defense of Narges Hosseini and other "Girls Of Revolution Street" protesters could easily end up with her being arrested and sent once again to Evin Prison. She made sure to speak to us through the camera about everything she wanted us to know before the government tried to silence her. I am daily struck by how she has found numerous ways not to be silenced despite her situation. She is an extraordinarily brilliant tactician all the while exuding respect and hospitality.

- Marcia

I often think about the long June 2018 Skype call Marcia and I had with Nasrin and Reza as they strolled through a Tehran park at dusk and we sat in a New York apartment. We spoke about the film, our kids, books, politics, and as always with Nasrin and Reza we found things to laugh about (even in the most difficult of times). A few days later, Nasrin was arrested. Two-and-a-half months later, Reza was also arrested. He was released in December (their kids were watched over by family members in their absence), and we spoke to him the next day. The first thing he said was, "I'm sorry if my being in prison interfered with the film." Nasrin, Reza, and their children have the most amazing spirit. They fill me with equal amounts of hope and worry every day.

- Jeff

5. Did the film change from your original idea for the film as you were filming or in post?

We knew that Nasrin was an extraordinary woman with enormous impact in Iran and around the world, and her story was already incredibly compelling. We couldn't have anticipated Nasrin's arrest, or the historic series of anti-hijab protests that broke out across Iran (with our cameras covering one of the leading figures), or our ability to discover rare archival footage like Nasrin arguing on behalf of Nobel Peace Prize laureate Shirin Ebadi in Tehran's Revolutionary Court. A note if you haven't seen the film: Nasrin is fierce.

Jeff created a script from the interview transcripts, B-Roll, archival footage, and personal writings of Nasrin and Reza, giving a narrative shape of the film with a sense of many key sequences for editing. We've worked with editor Asher Bingham on three other films. She has a wonderful sense of story, and she shares our sense of how important it is to have audiences connect emotionally to the people in the film, and to provide a sense of history and social context. One of the things we wanted to make clear is that the struggle of Nasrin and other women's rights activists in Iran goes back 150 years, and it continues today.

6. What were the challenges in making this film?

Protecting the identity of contributors in Iran who needed to be anonymous, getting footage out of the country, making absolute sure that everyone featured in the film wanted to be on camera and that they signed a detailed agreement, trying to raise funding for a project that we were keeping secret (that meant no crowdsourcing or public fundraising), working with translators who made sure every moment of dialogue is accurate down to the smallest sigh or comma, and always worrying about the health and safety of our colleagues in Iran.

7. What were the successes that you had in making this film?

We were thrilled when Academy Award-winning actress Olivia Colman agreed to do the narration - and by the strength and feeling she put into each line. Having Tony-winner composers Lynn Ahrens

& Stephen Flaherty write an original song for the film (based on Nasrin's letters to her children from prison) was an incredible gift, as was the way Grammy-winner Angélique Kidjo sang the song with such fierce emotion. We always hoped that acclaimed filmmaker Jafar Panahi (he cast Nasrin in his film *Taxi*, and they were co-winners of the Sakharov Peace Prize) could be in our documentary. Before she was arrested, Nasrin said she did shoot with him, but the footage was lost. Reza looked for it, but couldn't find it, and then he was arrested, as well. It was only after he was released in prison that he found a drive with that footage hidden in the house, along some other vital moments featured in the film. Getting that and every other hard-found scrap of footage was a triumph along the way. The ultimate success will be when Nasrin and other prisoners of conscience are freed and back home with the families.

8. What were the successes that you had in making this film?

One of the things we show in *NASRIN* is that for all the differences between the United States and Iran, there are also many things in common. Going to the Apple Store in a mall, walking your child home from school hand-in-hand, the need to freely follow your faith and beliefs. We also share a long and incomplete struggle for women's rights – and people in both countries are facing entrenched efforts to roll back those rights. Then there is Nasrin Sotoudeh herself: lawyer, devoted mother of two, and determined defender of human rights for all. When she was young, she found purpose in the examples of Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela. Through this documentary and her own growing reputation, Nasrin can be an inspiration for human rights around the world.

9. Was there a something special technically that you utilized in making this film - your cameras or sound or editing etc... and why were these important.

The camera crews in Iran worked under stressful conditions, often having to hide their camera as they followed Nasrin. Some of the sound quality was less than desired, but our audio editing team did a great job making most of it (sadly not all) better than useable.

10. Was there a something special technically that you utilized in making this film - your cameras or sound or editing etc... and why were these important.

We work together and we are married, and that can lead to a lot of long, intense days, but we are really lucky that we continue to find inspiration (and when things are difficult, solace) in each other. It also helps to work with people like Nasrin and Reza. How can you slow down or let down when you think of what they are going through?

11. Anything else you want to add about the making of the film and its importance?

Over the last few years we've seen freedoms slip away in many once-healthy democracies. Nasrin and her fellow human rights activists show that we need to be vigilant, resilient, and strong in defense of our rights. Nasrin never wanted this film to be just about her . . . she always wanted it to pay tribute to others, and to show a way forward. Nasrin is still in prison, facing decades behind bars, and dozens of lashes. Her husband Reza and 20-year-old daughter Mehraveh are home on bail, facing the threat of imprisonment. With the weight of all that pressure, they refuse to be intimidated or silenced. We appreciate the interest of everyone who shares their story.

NASRIN PRESS NOTES

SUBJECT BIOS



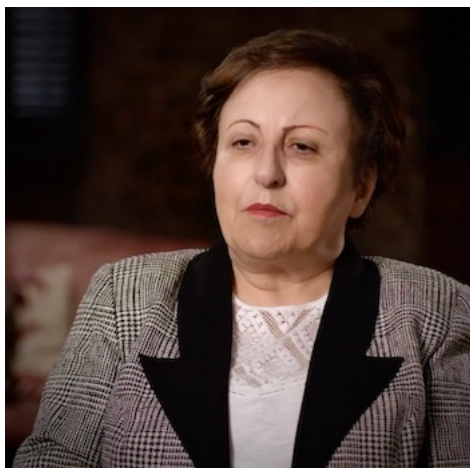
NASRIN SOTOUDEH

Nasrin began her career as a bank employee. On the side, she wrote for newspapers and journals under different names about the violation of human rights and women's rights. She started to practice law in 2003 and has often worked as a human rights activist with her husband, Reza Khandan. They have two children. Sotoudeh was arrested in June 2018 for representing women who publicly protest Iran's mandatory hijab laws, and sentenced to 38 years in prison, plus 148 lashes. Even in prison she has continued to challenge the authorities. In 2020 she launched a hunger strike to protest poor health conditions and the risk of Covid-19 in Iranian prisons.



ANN CURRY

Ann Curry is an American journalist and photojournalist, who has been a reporter for more than 30 years. Curry has reported from the wars in Kosovo, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Afghanistan, Darfur, Congo and the Central African Republic. In 2009, she traveled to Iran and interviewed Nasrin Sotoudeh for the NBC Dateline special "Behind the Veil: Inside Iran."



SHIRIN EBADI

Shirin Ebadi is a former Iranian lawyer and judge, a human rights activist, and the founder of Defenders of Human Rights Center in Iran. She was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2003 for her pioneering efforts for democracy and human rights, especially women's, children's, and refugee rights.



NARGES HOSSEINI

In 2018, Narges Hosseini stood on an electricity box on Tehran's Revolution Street and removed her headscarf to protest Iran's mandatory Hijab law. She was immediately arrested and soon represented by Nasrin Sotoudeh. The prosecutor said she had attempted to "encourage corruption through the removal of the hijab in public." A graduate student of sociology, she was later sentenced to two years in prison, with all but four months suspended.



REZA KHANDAN

Iranian activist Reza Khandan is the husband of Nasrin Sotoudeh. A designer and graphic artist, he has been imprisoned several times, most recently from September to December 2018 after he posted on Facebook about human rights violations in Iran. He was charged with acting against Iran's national security and supporting "anti-hijab" action and still faces a six-year prison sentence.



JAFAR PANAHI

Jafar Panâhi is an Iranian film director, screenwriter, and film editor. His feature film debut, *The White Balloon* won the *Caméra d'Or* at the 1995 Cannes Film Festival. In 2010 Panahi was given a 20-year ban on making films, but he has continued to make acclaimed movies, including *Taxi* which featured himself as a Tehran taxi driver and Nasrin Sotoudeh as one of his passengers. It won the top prize at the 65th Berlin International Film Festival in February 2015. In 2012 Panahi was co-winner, with Nasrin Sotoudeh, of the European Parliament's Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought.



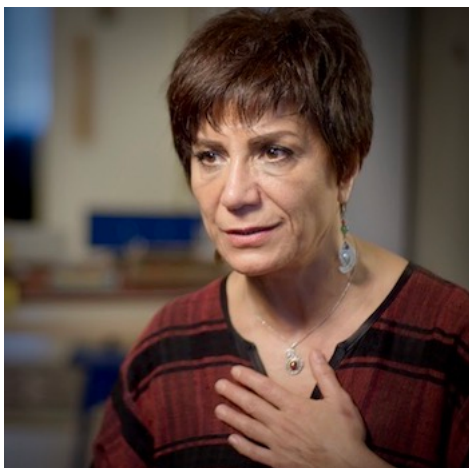
TAGHI RAHMANI

Taghi Rahmani is a journalist, author, and political activist who has spent more than a third of his life in Iranian prisons. He is married to Narges Mohammadi, another prominent Iranian human rights activist currently under imprisonment in Iran after being recently handed a 16-year sentence. In 2011, Rahmani immigrated to France with their two children where he now lives in exile.



MARIETJE SCHAAKE

Between 2009 and 2019, Marietje Schaake served as a Member of European Parliament for the Dutch liberal democratic party. During that time she was instrumental in the presentation of the Sakharov Prize to Nasrin Sotoudeh. She is now the international policy director at Stanford University's Cyber Policy Center and international policy fellow at Stanford's Institute for Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence.



MANSOUREH SHOJAEI

Mansoureh Shojaee has been one of the leaders of the Iranian women's rights movement for over 20 years and involved in politics for more than 30 years. She was one of the creators of the One Million Signatures Campaign for Equality and co-founder of the website The Feminist School. She was imprisoned several times in Iran, and now lives in exile in the Netherlands. Shojaee is the founder of The Iranian Women's Movement Museum, and of the online platform the Iran Women's Movement Documentation Center.

NASRIN
PRESS NOTES

FILMMAKER BIOS



JEFF KAUFMAN produced, directed, & wrote the Emmy-nominated documentary *Terrence McNally: Every Act Of Life* (aired on American Masters), and the documentaries *The State of Marriage*, *Father Joseph*, *The Savoy King: Chick Webb and the Music That Changed America*, *Brush With Life: The Art of Being Edward Biberman*, and *Education Under Fire*, plus a number of short films for Amnesty International, and programs for The Discovery Channel, and The History Channel. He also edited/designed a book based on the film *Every Act Of Life*, contributed cartoons to *The New Yorker*, and illustrations to *The Los Angeles Times* and *The New York Times*, wrote/illustrated several children's books, and hosted daily radio shows in Vermont and Los Angeles.



MARCIA ROSS produced the Emmy-nominated documentary *Terrence McNally: Every Act Of Life*, and the documentaries *The State of Marriage*, *Father Joseph*, and *The Savoy King*. Additionally, she has a 3-decade career as an independent casting director and casting executive, serving 16 years as EVP for Casting at Walt Disney Motion Pictures, and 5 years as VP for Casting and Talent Development at Warner Brothers TV. Some of her film and television credits include *Clueless*, *Cujo*, *thirtysomething*, *Murder in Mississippi*, *10 Things I Hate About You*, *The Princess Diaries*, *Romy and Michele's High School Reunion*, *The Lookout*, *Enchanted*, *Oblivion*, and *Parental Guidance*.

NASRIN PRESS NOTES

Original song “**How Can I Tell You?**” written by the Tony Award-winning and Academy Award-nominated team of Lynn Ahrens (lyrics) & Stephen Flaherty (music).
Performed by 4-time Grammy winner Angélique Kidjo



LYNN AHRENS and **STEPHEN FLAHERTY** have won Tony, Drama Desk and Outer Critics Circle Awards for the Broadway hit *Ragtime* and were nominated for two Academy Awards and two Golden Globes for the animated feature film *Anastasia*. They also adapted *Anastasia* for the Broadway stage. Their musical *Once On This Island* won London's Olivier Award and Broadway's 2018 Tony Award for Best Revival of a Musical. Other theatre credits include *Seussical*, *Rocky*, *My Favorite Year*, *A Man of No Importance* and *The Glorious Ones*, and two upcoming shows, *Knoxville* and *Marie*. They are four-time Grammy nominees and recipients of the Oscar Hammerstein Lifetime Achievement Award. In 2015 Ahrens and Flaherty were inducted into the Theater Hall of Fame.

4-time Grammy Award winner **ANGÉLIQUE KIDJO** has recorded thirteen albums. *Time Magazine* called her, "Africa's premier diva" and The Guardian listed her as one of their Top 100 Most Inspiring Women in the World. She is the recipient of the prestigious 2015 Crystal Award given by the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland and the 2016 Amnesty International Ambassador of Conscience Award. At the G7 Summit in 2019, President Macron of France named Kidjo as the spokesperson for the AFAWA initiative (Affirmative Finance Action for Women in Africa) to help close the financing gap for women entrepreneurs in Africa. She has also created her own charitable foundation, Batonga, dedicated to support the education of young girls in Africa.



NASRIN
PRESS NOTES

CREDIT BLOCK

Floating World Pictures presents "NASRIN"

Narrated by Academy Award-winner Olivia Colman

With an original song written by the Tony Award-winning and Academy Award-nominated team of Lynn Ahrens (lyrics) & Stephen Flaherty (music), performed by 4-time Grammy winner Angélique Kidjo

Featuring: Ann Curry, Shirin Ebadi, Narges Hosseini, Reza Khandan, Jafar Panahi, Taghi Rahmani, Marietje Schaake, Mansoureh Shojaee, and Nasrin Sotoudeh

Editor: Asher Bingham

Cinematography: Anonymous

Music By: Tyler Strickland

Associate Producer: Omid Memarian

Consulting Producer: Amir Soltani

Executive Producers: Jay Alix & Una Jackman, Nina Ansary, Hadi Ghaemi, David & Homeira Hoffman, Nazee Moinian, Jason Rezaian, Ted Snowdon & Duffy Violante, Kristen Wolf

Producer: Marcia S. Ross

Director, Producer, Writer: Jeff Kaufman