

MAYA & SAMAR

SERENDIPITY POINT FILMS
JANUARY FILMS

Present

In Co-Production with
FILMIKI

With the Participation of
TELEFILM CANADA
VVS FILMS

In Association with
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CRAVE
CBC FILMS

With the Participation of
ONTARIO CREATES
HELLENIC FILM & AUDIOVISUAL CENTER – CREATIVE GREECE

Maya & Samar is a Canada-Hellenic Republic Co-Production and was filmed on location in Athens, Greece and Hamilton, Canada.

Maya & Samar is distributed by VVS Films in Canada. Distant Horizon is handling International Sales.

DIRECTED BY
Anita Doron

WRITTEN BY
Tamara Faith Berger

PRODUCED BY
Robert Lantos
Julia Rosenberg

PRODUCER
Laura Lanktree

SUPERVISING PRODUCER
Steve Solomos

CO-PRODUCER
Nikolas Alavanos

STARRING
Nicolette Pearse (*Everything & The Universe, Maybe It's You*)
Amanda Babaei Vieira (*Störung*)
Brenna Coates (*Burden*)
Antonis Giannakos (*ReUniverse, Save Me*)
Aris Athanasopoulos (*The Killer I Picked Up*)
Agni Scott (*Find Me Falling, Bridget Jones' Baby*)

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MUSIC BY
Katie Austra Stelmanis

CASTING BY
John Buchan C.S.A.
Jason Knight C.S.A.
Laura Windows
Sofia Dimopoulou

LOGLINE

Set in contemporary Athens, *Maya & Samar* tells the story of two young women from conflicting cultures whose brief, yet torrid affair endangers the life of one, while propelling the other to instant online fame.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

Maya, a rising journalist at a hip indie website, covers sex and music with free-flowing thought and liberal practice. Samar, a queer Afghan who landed in Greece following a harrowing escape from the Taliban, lives without papers in Athens, dancing in a club for cash. After a fateful meeting on the outskirts of Athens, their worlds collide in a brief yet torrid affair that exposes their conflicting cultures. With Samar, Maya crafts her latest headline; with Maya, Samar crafts an unexpected twist, exposing the raw truth behind privilege.

LONG SYNOPSIS

MAYA, a driven journalist at an indie website, is in the bathroom stall in a busy club in downtown Toronto. She's performing a blow job, not a care in the world.

On the other side of the world, the Taliban have invaded Kabul. SAMAR isn't safe. After a tearful goodbye to her mother, she flees.

Maya travels to Athens to see her old journalism school friend, REBECCA. Once there, she is surprised to learn that Rebecca is pregnant -- and to meet a handsome Greek man named YAN. Yan takes Maya to a covert electronic dance music party just outside of Athens. That is where Maya and Samar collide. From the moment Maya spots Samar on the dance floor, she's drawn into her world. Samar slowly reveals herself to Maya -- first as a stripper working in an Athens club, then as a queer woman living without status as a refugee. Maya quickly adds professional curiosity to lust and makes Samar the new subject of her next story. Their connection deepens when a planned interview turns into all-consuming sex.

Maya is completely engrossed in Samar. She goes back to Samar's apartment after the promise of more sex, but before they can connect a man bursts in. He attacks Samar violently. Maya tries to help but is not strong enough. A helpless witness, she films the attack on her phone.

Maya takes Samar, badly beaten, back to Rebecca's place. She wants to take action, call the police, find the asshole who is responsible. But Samar only wants to watch the video over and over again. Maya asks if she can post the video as part of her story and Samar consents.

The next morning, Samar sneaks out, but not before Rebecca sees her. Furious with Maya for threatening her family's safety, Rebecca kicks Maya out. Meanwhile, the story and video go viral. And Samar is nowhere to be found.

Fearing the worst, Maya searches the city frantically. Just as she starts to lose hope, Samar texts to suggest they meet. Samar has been granted emergency asylum in Sweden. The video of the assault was crucial to her application. That is why she asked her friend to assault her -- the video of her being "punished" was not only her exit strategy, it might also save her mother and sister from dangerous shame. Maya used Samar for her next story; Samar used Maya to survive.

We close on Samar's mother, back in Afghanistan, learning that her daughter is now safe.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

What happens when a life of endless possibilities crashes into a life where possibilities must be hard-earned and forged? *Maya & Samar* is a story of collisions, unraveling certainty into chaos. Maya moves through the world untethered, searching for meaning

in excess, until she meets Samar—a woman whose every breath is an act of resistance. Their encounter is not just an affair; it is a reckoning that holds a mirror up to the illusions of the saviour, and to the truths we prefer avoiding.

I have always hoped to film desire and lust from inside a woman's body and mind. Female sexuality is not a performance. It is not decorative. It is not a choreography to titillate the viewer, but a poetic, unruly, visceral, spiritual merging of bodies and minds. It is a touch reverberating through the body, a longing reshaping each breath. It is a pulse, a hunger, our quietly raging forces united through the skin, the lips, the eyes. It is surrendering as an act of power, not as submission. It is an expression of our fire, shared, unfiltered and unapologetic. For Maya - it is a natural manifestation of the self. For Samar, it is also a fearless act of rebellion.

We live in a world where, by geography, some of us get to obsess over the perfect eye shadow, and some of us must be wrapped in cloth and imprisoned in homes, forbidden to study, to face the sun, to sing, to dance, to be a sexual, independent being. The injustice of this duality is heartbreaking.

—Anita Doron

PRODUCTION NOTES

Freedom of Choice

Maya & Samar is an intersectional story about two very different women – Maya, a free-spirit from Canada, and Samar, a Muslim woman from Afghanistan who has just fled her country to save herself from the Taliban. Despite their situational differences, which are never unappreciated or flattened, the two meet in meaningful ways. They both have strong characters, particular and unmistakable voices. They both demonstrate fluid sexual orientation. And yet, through accidents of birth, Maya's privilege, and fundamental safety, as opposed to Samar's oppression and life-threatening danger, could not be more different.

"They're colliding from very different circumstances," screenwriter Tamara Faith Berger shares of her two lead characters. "They come together really quickly -- the passion and the explosion are there right away. And their affair has far-reaching consequences, beyond either of their ability to predict it or control it."

Maya & Samar underscores this fundamental difference by juxtaposing the actions and decisions of these two women both in pivotal scenes, as well as via nuance throughout the film. Ultimately Maya is free to explore Samar's world, to fall in love, to expose Samar's story in the press – to make choices and live her life without consequences. But Samar doesn't know choice. Hers is a life of oppression, and every action and decision she makes centers around survival.

"Bravery can only be where there is fear," says actress Amanda Babaei Vieira, who plays Samar.

Culture Clash

The film explores characters from marginalized communities. The filmmaking team endeavoured to employ a thoughtful, intentional plan to inform its representation of these communities, so that - when seeing themselves depicted in this film - people from these communities finally feeling 'seen'.

The most vital tool within this effort was a vast and active group of consultants who spoke with writer Tamara Faith Berger about the script. For example, LGBTQ activist Aylar Rezaee fled Kabul in August 2021 when it fell to Taliban rule, and she shared that experience with Faith Berger. Jordan Byron is a transgender man who documented his transition while embedded in the Taliban in the 2022 documentary film, *Transition*, and Kiana Hayeri is a photojournalist whose intimate portraits during the war in her adopted home of Afghanistan have been published in publications such as *The New York Times*. Both spoke to the team to help authenticate life in Afghanistan, both before and after the fall.

Most fascinatingly, the filmmakers came across Yasmeena Ali, whose story is alarmingly in line with that of Samar. She is an Afghan woman whose own father and uncle tried to have her murdered for marrying a Jewish man and pursuing a career in adult film. She spent hours upon hours working with the team, and the lead actors, to help bring Samar to life.

"I did extensive research, starting 7 months before we started to shoot" Babaei Vieira shares. "I spoke to people who fled from the region and read many books – I think it was 25 books on this topic, and I watched a lot of interviews and documentaries." She even had a playlist for her character to help set the tone for each scene and authenticate Samar at every turn.

Shooting in Greece

In this story where cultures collide and passions flare, there's no better setting than Athens, Greece. "It hosts so many people from all over the world," Faither Berger shares. "And over the last ten years, it's really been an epicenter of the refugee crisis. This complicated place, both politically and historically complicates the affair between a Westerner and an Afghan refugee."

Athens is also pulsing with energy and life. "Everyone is so social," says Nicolette Pearse, who plays Maya, "I felt like the city was just buzzing around me all the time. And I could feel the warm, excitable, intelligent energy of the people and our crew. I've never felt so connected with a crew. Everyone was so talented and professional. I felt like everyone I worked with became my friend very literally."

Love Against All Odds

From their very first encounter in an abandoned warehouse in the outskirts of Athens, Maya and Samar's chemistry is palpable. They are drawn to one another magnetically and from that moment on, Maya can't get Samar out of her head.

"[My co-star] Amanda was enigmatic to me. I was so curious [about her]. I felt like I couldn't quite figure her out," says Pearse of her on-screen partner. "I think that is exactly what pulls Maya in: Samar is holding so much back, but at the same time, [she's] so present. Samar is not holding back because she's afraid of what other people think of her. She's not insecure. She just has self-preservation. And for Maya, that is the mystery and the excitement."

"Maya has a lust for life. She wants to experience things, but she has been more sheltered and her world is smaller," she continues. "And then she comes across someone who has lived a difficult life but is still showing up with passion and with confidence. That is electric to Maya, because not only is she interested in the enigmatic nature of Samar, but there is something strong and courageous in Samar that Maya envies."

Babaei Vieira further explains, "There is a gap of comprehension [between them] that doesn't need to be closed somehow. We can see that they are from different worlds, but they can still share this connection without having to explain where they are from and what they've been through. They know the other person can't grasp it. And maybe it's not necessary for them to grasp it."

In addition to their intellectual connection, Maya and Samar lust for one another. "I felt excited to tell the story of two women expressing their sexuality in a free world," director Anita Doron shares. "I've always hoped to film desire and lust from inside a woman's body and mind." Which results in a refreshing take on sex through the female gaze.

Shedding Light On Female Oppression

In the film, Samar explains her harrowing escape to Maya and highlights that she was forced to leave her home because she was "gay and cavorting with foreigners". Those two simple things are commonplace for Maya and the world she comes from, but they put Samar's life at risk – not only at home in Kabul, but even abroad in Athens. It was key to the filmmaking team, to show that even in the diaspora, Muslim women are still in danger of honour beatings and killings, which is often buried in the news.

"I have friends [who are] like family [living] in Kabul and Kandahar, so the fate of Afghanistan resonates with me deeply," Doron says. "I feel a physical revulsion in my body thinking about the women of Afghanistan who continually lose their basic human rights." The film gained a deeper meaning with this in mind and, while a love story at heart, also became an opportunity to shed a light not only on oppression itself, but what can surface as a result of it.

"We tend to focus on the oppression people go through and not really on how they are equipped going into it," Babaei Vieira says, speaking to Samar's inner-strength and earned wisdom. "I don't think that she wanted to leave Afghanistan," she continues. "I think she wanted to stay there, but it became really dangerous to stay. This loneliness of not being with the community you had before, and the family you had before, is something that people tend to forget. They just see someone seeking refuge in another country and forget that maybe they didn't really want to go. A lot of people in Afghanistan are fighting for what they had before and what they imagine can be again."

CAST BIOS

NICOLETTE PEARSE ("Maya")

Nicolette Pearse is a Canadian-American actress best known for her recurring roles in Netflix's *Kim's Convenience*, CW's *Burden of Truth*, and Hulu's *Cardinal*. She was born and raised on Vancouver Island in BC and graduated from Queen's University with a Bachelor of Arts in Theatre and Politics. She lives in Toronto, ON, where she

competed in amateur boxing before quitting to study acting more seriously. She now divides her time between Toronto and LA and has expanded her creativity into photography, visual art, and directing. Nicolette's more recent work can be seen on the medical procedural *Transplant* (NBC), the crime drama *Clarice* (CBS) and the romantic comedy *Maybe It's You* (MarVist Entertainment). In 2024, audiences were introduced to her as the highly skeptical and sexually fluid, 'Jane Kinney,' in *Everything and the Universe*, an upcoming romantic comedy from UK independent production company *Shot of Tea*. Next Nicolette can be seen in a supporting lead role in *We Forgot To Break Up*, directed by Karen Knox, and the starring role in *Maya & Samar*, directed by Anita Doron.

AMANDA BABAEI VIEIRA ("Samar")

Amanda Babaei Vieira is an actor and writer based in Hamburg. She was born in Hildesheim to parents from Rio de Janeiro and Sari in Iran. Among others she played at Volksbühne Berlin, Maxim Gorki Theater, Schauspielhaus Hamburg, Wiener Festwochen, Kampnagel and the New European Theatre Festival Saint Petersburg. She co-founded the theatre collective SV Szlachta, who create action art performances since 2018, and co-authored several plays, most recently with the feminist collective Glossy Pain. Since 2013 she collaborated with the Danish-Austrian performance group SIGNA. In 2024, she was awarded the Ulrich Wildgruber Prize. For a brief moment in time she had a drag band called The Nana Jamón Experience.

CREATIVE BIOS

ANITA DORON (Director)

Anita Doron began her filmmaking journey at the age of 12, facing the ire of USSR bureaucrats over her protest film. A Canadian-Hungarian writer and director, her films have premiered at TIFF, SXSW, and IFF Rotterdam. Her debut feature, *The Lesser Blessed*, earned a Canadian Screen Award nomination for Best Adapted Screenplay. She wrote the screenplay for the Academy Award and Golden Globe-nominated animated feature *The Breadwinner*, winning a Canadian Screen Award and receiving nominations for an Annie Award and a Humanitas Prize. A Senior TED Fellow and a proud shepherdess, Anita keeps searching for the real in magic, and for the magic in reality.

TAMARA FAITH BERGER (Writer)

Tamara Faith Berger's career as a writer started with pornographic fiction for XXX-rated magazines. *Lie With Me*, Tamara's first novel, was published in Canada in 2001.

She co-wrote the film *Lie With Me* (2005) with director Clement Virgo, which appeared at TIFF and Berlinale. *Maidenhead*, published by Coach House Books, was released in March 2012. It won The Believer Book Award and was also nominated for an Ontario Trillium Award. *Little Cat* was published by Coach House Books in 2013. An erotic novella, *Kuntalini*, came out in 2016 with artist Paul Chan's New York imprint Badlands Unlimited. *Queen Solomon* was published by Coach House Books in 2018 and it was nominated for an Ontario Trillium Award. Her latest novel, *Yara*, was published in 2023. Tamara's books have been translated into French, Spanish and German. Two films she wrote are being released in 2025: *Steal Away* (directed by Clement Virgo) and *Maya & Samar* (directed by Anita Doron). She lives and works in Toronto.

ROBERT LANTOS (Producer)

From 1973 to 1998 Robert Lantos founded and built Canada's leading film and television company, Alliance Communications Corporation, of which he was Chairman and CEO. He sold Alliance in 1998 and subsequently formed the boutique production company Serendipity Point Films, under which he has produced several award-winning features. Four of his films - *The Sweet Hereafter*, *Being Julia*, *Eastern Promises* and *Barney's Version* - have received Oscar Nominations. Golden Globe nominations include *Sunshine* and *Eastern Promises* for Best Picture and *Being Julia* and *Barney's Version* won best actress and actor respectively. He has had 10 films in official competition at Cannes, most recently David Cronenberg's *Crimes of the Future* (2022), with *The Sweet Hereafter* (1997) being awarded the Cannes Jury Grand Prix, and *Crash* awarded a Special Jury Prize. *Museo* and *eXistenZ* won Silver Bears in Berlin, and *Barney's Version* took home the Audience Award in Venice. Four of his films have won Best Picture at the Canadian Screen Awards.

JULIA ROSENBERG (Producer)

Julia Rosenberg worked for nearly two decades as a film executive where she was an associate or co-producer of award-winning films such as Istvan Szabo's *Being Julia* (starring Annette Bening) and Jeremy Podeswa's *Fugitive Pieces*. She then launched January Films where she has produced scripted features and documentaries that include the feature documentary *The Bodybuilder and I*, which won Best Canadian Documentary at Hot Docs and *Real Time*, starring Randy Quaid and Jay Baruchel. At TIFF 2021, Julia premiered *Charlotte*, an animated feature film for adults based on the life and work of painter Charlotte Salomon, starring Keira Knightley, which was released theatrically in Canada and the US in April, 2022, followed by releases in major international markets. January Films recently rebranded to January Media to better encompass its slate across various media. January Media has three feature films releasing in 2025: *Maya & Samar*, written by Tamara Faith Berger, directed by Anita

Doron; *Out Standing*, written by Mélanie Charbonneau & Martine Pagé, directed by Mélanie Charbonneau; and *Birth of a Family*, co-written and directed by Tasha Hubbard.

LAURA LANKTREE (Producer)

Laura Lanktree is Vice President of Development and Production for Serendipity Point Films. She was Co-producer on David Cronenberg's *CRIMES OF THE FUTURE*, starring Viggo Mortensen, Léa Seydoux, and Kristen Stewart, which premiered in competition at the Cannes Film Festival in 2022. In her tenure at Serendipity, Laura has worked on developing countless feature films and television projects, overseeing a broad slate of prestige scripted content.

About SERENDIPITY POINT FILMS

Toronto-based Serendipity Point Films produces theatrical feature films and prestige television. Its credits include: *RISE OF THE RAVEN*, an epic 10-part limited series based on the true story of Janos Hunyadi, a Hungarian warrior who saved Western Europe from invasion; David Cronenberg's *CRIMES OF THE FUTURE*, a Cannes official selection starring Viggo Mortensen, Léa Seydoux and Kristen Stewart; François Girard's *THE SONG OF NAMES*, winner of five Canadian Screen Awards, starring Tim Roth and Clive Owen; Alonso Ruizpalacios' *MUSEO*, a Berlin Festival Silver Bear Award winner, starring Gael García Bernal; Atom Egoyan's *REMEMBER*, a Venice Audience Award winner, starring Christopher Plummer; Richard J. Lewis' *BARNEY'S VERSION*, an Oscar Nominee and Golden Globe Winner, starring Dustin Hoffman, Rosamund Pike, and Paul Giamatti; Atom Egoyan's *ADORATION*, a Cannes Award winner, starring Scott Speedman and Rachel Blanchard; Jeremy Podeswa's *FUGITIVE PIECES*, a Rome Festival winner, starring Stephen Dillane, Rosamund Pike, Ayelet Zurer, and Rade Serbedzija; David Cronenberg's *EASTERN PROMISES*, an Oscar nominee, starring Viggo Mortensen, Naomi Watts and Vincent Cassel; Atom Egoyan's *WHERE THE TRUTH LIES*, a Canadian Screen Award winner, starring Colin Firth, Kevin Bacon, and Alison Lohman; István Szabó's *BEING JULIA*, an Oscar nominee and Golden Globe winner, starring Annette Bening and Jeremy Irons; Norman Jewison's *THE STATEMENT*, a National Board of Review Special Award winner, starring Michael Caine and Tilda Swinton; Atom Egoyan's *ARARAT*, a Cannes official selection, starring Christopher Plummer and Arsinée Khanjian; Denys Arcand's *STARDOM*, a Cannes official selection, starring Jessica Paré, Dan Aykroyd, and Frank Langella; István Szabó's *SUNSHINE*, a Golden Globe Nominee and European Film Award winner, starring Ralph Fiennes, Rachel Weisz, William Hurt and Molly Parker; Atom Egoyan's *FELICIA'S*

JOURNEY, a Cannes official selection, starring Bob Hoskins and Elaine Cassidy; David Cronenberg's *eXistenZ*, a Berlin Festival Silver Bear Award winner, starring Jude Law, Jennifer Jason Leigh and Willem Dafoe; Atom Egoyan's *THE SWEET HEREAFTER*, a Cannes Grand Prix winner and Oscar nominee, starring Ian Holm and Sarah Polley; David Cronenberg's *CRASH*, a Cannes Jury Prize Award winner, starring James Spader, Holly Hunter, Deborah Kara Unger, and Elias Koteas; and Robert Longo's *JOHNNY MNEMONIC*, starring Keanu Reeves. For more information, please visit, www.serendipitypoint.com.

About JANUARY MEDIA

Since its founding in 2005, January has produced films across a wide range of genres. From its first film, the theatrical documentary *The Bodybuilder and I* (Best Canadian Documentary, Hot Docs 2007) to its most recently released film, the animated feature *Charlotte* starring Keira Knightley (Canada's Top Ten 2021, Nominated for Best Indie Feature Annie Awards), January's productions are in collaboration with the best of Canadian and international talent and financing. In 2024, January produced three live-action features, all set for release in 2025: *Out Standing*, directed by Mélanie Charbonneau; *Maya & Samar*, directed by Anita Doron; and *Birth of a Family*, directed by Tasha Hubbard.

About FILMIKI

Filmiki was established in 1987. For almost 35 years, it has been one of the most respected companies in the film industry, while involved both in local and international projects. FILMIKI has produced over 2,500 TVCs, 30 feature & short films, TV series & shows and numerous music videos. The company is guided by a young team of producers, directors and storytellers who are unflinching in their commitment to innovation and creation. Combining the experience of its founders with the expertise of young professionals, FILMIKI is dedicated to creating a rich and diverse range of international content: TV shows, commercial and promotional videos, feature films, creative and web-based documentaries, and documentary series.