

My ملي تلي Sweet فانجر في Land



MY SWEET LAND | سلىو پوهو ا - WORLD PREMIERE

Sheffield DocFest 2024 - *Official Selection International First Feature Competition*

Produced by **HAI Creative** In co-production with **Sister Productions** and **Soilsú Films**
A co-production of **ITVS** in association with **ARTE France** and **World of HA Productions**

USA, France, Ireland, Jordan | 2024 | 86 minutes

www.mysweetlandfilm.com

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LOGLINE & SYNOPSIS

LOGLINE

For 11-year-old Vrej, life in his homeland, Artsakh is like a paradise, but when war starts again, can he carry a nation's hopes on his young shoulders?

SYNOPSIS

My Sweet Land is a coming-of-age story set against a multigenerational war in the post-Soviet Caucasus Mountains. It follows an 11-year-old boy named Vrej, growing up in Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) who dreams of becoming a dentist in his picture-postcard village with its roaming ducks and golden bees. His sweet land, however, is strewn with mines from previous wars, shaping a country that remains unrecognized to the world. Vrej's life takes a sudden turn when war erupts, forcing him to flee with his family. He spends his days in exile impatiently waiting for victory, but reality takes a different turn; Armenians lose the war. Upon returning to his surviving village, he confronts the devastation, new power dynamics, and an education that prepares the children for near-future battles. Vrej must learn the rules of war... But can he carry a nation's hopes on his young shoulders? The film is a testament to the people of Artsakh, where hope and trauma had shaped their resilience across generations.



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

As a great-grandchild of Armenian genocide survivors, I carry the deeply-rooted traumas of my ancestors who were expelled from their indigenous lands and found refuge in the Middle East. I grew up in a small community of Armenians in Jordan, attended schools where nationalism was praised and recited poems about the lands that “will be freed” one day. Nothing and no one has been freed.

In 2018, that trauma brought me to a hidden enclave in the stoic mountains of the South Caucasus, named Artsakh, internationally known as Nagorno-Karabakh. As an Armenian, I wanted to hear the stories of its ethnic Armenian population who, to this day, are engaged in wars to preserve their homeland and cultural identity. The story that started to unveil before my camera was about the generational cycle of trauma that kept the resilience of a people alive while passing down the burdens of war to its children. That’s when I met Vrej.

Through the eyes of Vrej, a sweet eleven-year-old boy who is wise beyond his years, the film paints an intimate and raw picture of what it means to grow up in a militarized land. By documenting his journey through war and turmoil, Vrej reveals the truth to us about his traumatized society, his family and his dreams that are in stark contrast to the dark future that awaits him and his land that's at the verge of disappearing.

I made this film because I strongly believe that the story of Vrej and all children, whose basic human rights are ripped away from them the day they are born, should be seen and heard. These children have hopes and dreams and deserve to live in peace—not as prisoners to inherited wars.



FILMMAKING TEAM

SAREEN HAIRABEDIAN: PRODUCER/DIRECTOR

Sareen is an Armenian-Jordanian documentary filmmaker based in the U.S. Through her intimate observational filming style, she captures the untold stories of the underrepresented. Hairabedian's directorial debut *WE ARE NOT DONE YET* is a 40-minute HBO documentary about U.S. veterans grappling with PTSD who use poetry to heal.



(Best Documentary, G.I. Film Festival, Nominee for Best Documentary Short at the IDA Awards 2018). *MY SWEET LAND* is her debut feature-length documentary featuring one child's journey through disillusionment, trauma, and hope. It's the recipient of the IDFA Spotlight Award, and has the support of ITVS, ARTE, International Documentary Association, Arab Fund for Arts & Culture, Jordan Film Fund, CNC and others. Sareen is a fellow at DocNYCxVC Incubator and a fellow at Creative Armenia.

AZZA HOURANI: PRODUCER

Azza is a Jordanian producer and assistant director with over 15 years in the industry. A 2011 graduate of the Red Sea Institute of Cinematic Arts, she has worked with National Geographic, the Doha Film Institute, MBC, and various global non-profit organizations. Azza produced *MY SWEET LAND* by Sareen Hairabedian, an IDFA Spotlight Award winner in 2021, set to premiere at Sheffield DocFest



2024 in the "First International Feature" category. Her assistant director credits include notable films like Ali Abbasi's *HOLY SPIDER* (Palme d'Or nominee 2022), Abu Bakr Shawky's *HAJJAN* (TIFF 2023), and Amjad Al Rasheed's *INSHALLAH A BOY* (Cannes 2023). Azza is currently developing her third short film, aiming for production by the end of 2024.

JULIE PARATIAN: CO-PRODUCER

Julie Paratian created SISTER Productions (an anagram of RESIST) with emphasis on an international, feminist and militant approach. Julie has a 20-year experience in international co-productions with countries ranging from Greece, Srilanka, Belgium to Tunisia, Jordan and the USA. She has produced around thirty documentary and fiction films noticed in major festivals: from debut films to later works with experienced directors, TV or cinematic pieces as well as art films, all of SISTER's works take strong political stances and explore unique cinematic expressions. Her latest release was CAITI BLUES directed by Justine Harbonnier (ACID Cannes 2023), THE CASTLE by Martín Benchimol (Berlinale - Panorama), UNDER THE LEAVES by Florence Lazar (awarded at Cinéma du Réel 2024).



DAVID RANE: CO-PRODUCER

David is a BAFTA and IFTA-winning producer, whose main focus is social issue docs for cinema and international co-productions. His work includes IN LOCO PARENTIS (School Life) 2016 (IDFA and Sundance); YOUNG PLATO, 2022 IDA and BIFA nominees, screened at 65 festivals, and won 15 awards; MUCH ADO ABOUT DYING, directed by Simon Chambers (IDFA, 2022, Best Directing Award) GIRL TAKEN, Paramount Plus UK in July 2022. Current features include THE ALEXANDER COMPLEX, directed by Neasa Ní Chianáin, which premiered at Thessaloniki in 2024, and MY SWEET LAND, directed by Sareen Hairabedian. David is regularly a panelist and guest speaker at festivals and film industry conferences, is a member of the pre-selection jury for the PGA awards, and expert assessor for Eurimages.



BETH LEVISON: EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

Levison is an award-winning producer/director based in NYC. Most recently, she executive produced GRAND THEFT HAMLET (SXSW 2024 Grand Jury Prize winner for Best Documentary Film) and produced A PHOTOGRAPHIC MEMORY (True/False 2024). Her 2022 producing effort, THE MARTHA MITCHELL EFFECT, premiered at Sundance, launched on Netflix, and was nominated for a 2023 Academy Award (Best Documentary Short), while STORM LAKE, which she directed alongside DP Jerry Risius and also produced (Independent Lens, 2022), was shortlisted by the IDA as one of the best films of 2021. Other producing credits include Emmy-nominated MADE IN BOISE (Independent Lens, 2020), Emmy-nominated PERSONAL STATEMENT (PBS, 2018), and 32 PILLS (HBO, 2017). Levison is a co-founder of the Documentary Producers Alliance, teaching faculty with Sarah Lawrence College, and a member of the Academy.



TIGRAN HAMASYAN: MUSIC COMPOSER

Tigran Hamasyan is considered one of the most remarkable and distinctive jazz-meets-rock pianists/composers of his generation. Hamasyan seamlessly fuses potent jazz improvisation and progressive rock with the rich folkloric music of his native Armenia. Born in Gyumri, Armenia, in 1987, his musical journey began in his childhood home at the age of three. Tigran won the Montreux Jazz Festival's piano competition in 2003. He released his debut album, World Passion, in 2004, the following year, he won the prestigious Thelonious Monk International Jazz Piano Competition. His Nonesuch debut, Mockroot (2015), won the Echo Jazz Award for International Piano Instrumentalist of the Year. Tigran's new conceptual album 'The Bird of a Thousand Voices', is an intriguing immersive light installation with shadow play, digitally programmed voices, live music, and an Armenian-English libretto, that will have its world premiere at Holland Festival in 2024. Hamasyan has built a dedicated following worldwide, as well as praise from Herbie Hancock, Brad Mehldau and the late Chick Corea. (photo: Vahan Stepanyan)



CREDITS

Produced & Directed by

Sareen Hairabedian

Produced by

Azza Hourani

Co-Produced by

Julie Paratian

David Rane

Executive Producers

Beth Levison

Carrie Lozano

Hallee Adelman

Rintu Thomas

Sushmit Ghosh

Co-executive Producer

Robina Riccitiello

Supervising Producer

Shana Swanson

Cinematography by

Sareen Hairabedian

Edited by

Raphaëlle Martin-Holger

Sareen Hairabedian

Music Composed & Produced by

Tigran Hamasyan

Sound Recording by

Azza Hourani





Colorist

Shanna Maurizi

Sound

Tom Efinger

Featuring

Vrej Khachatryan & Family

Publicist

Sylvia Savadjian

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Arte France

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La PROCIREP

L'ANGOA

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IDA Enterprise Documentary Fund

The Jordan Film Fund

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