

SYLVANA, DEMON OR DIVA

Digital Presskit

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SPECS

Title	Sylvana, Demon or Diva
Screening formats	DCP, Quicktime ProRes, DVD (other formats upon request) 16:9 / 5.1
Dialogues	Dutch
Available subtitles	English
Duration	90'
Country	The Netherlands
Finished	November 2018

CREDITS

Director	Ingeborg Jansen
Producer	Eric Velthuis / KVFilms
Directors of photography	Diderik Evers Joost van Herwijnen NSC Victor Horstink Rogier Timmermans
Sound recordists	David Spaans, Suzanne Helmer
Film editor	Patrick Janssens NCE
Sound designer	Jeroen Goeijers
Produced by	KVFilms
In association with	EO

This film was produced within the framework of Teledoc. A cooperation between Dutch Film Fund, the CoBO fund and NPO.

FESTIVALS

World premiere at International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam (IDFA)
November 2018

LOGLINE

Bold, black and beautiful: ever since former TV-show host Sylvana Simons started speaking out against racism, part of the Dutch public has resented her deeply. As she campaigns to enter politics, reactions are mixed and fierce.

SYNOPSIS

Sylvana Simons is a remarkable political newcomer in the Netherlands. A former TV-show host and showbizz celebrity, she uses her fame and her personal experience as a black woman in her fight against racism and inequality. Since she started speaking out, she has been despised by some parts of the Dutch public. She receives hate mail on a daily basis and occasionally death threats.

The documentary shows Sylvana as she campaigns for a place in the Amsterdam city council with her own political party BIJ1 ('together'). Fierce and eloquent in debates and interviews, she shows her personal side, fatigue and vulnerability at home and in talks with a coach. Will she succeed in gaining a seat on the city council? Much is at stake: since she has spoken out against racism, she is shunned as a tv-presenter. Apart from being an exciting portrayal of a political campaign, the documentary shows a strong-willed woman who has given up a glamorous life and her personal safety to fight for equality.

PUBLICITY MATERIALS

Poster

[Link](#)

Stills

[1](#) (main still) [2](#) [3](#) [4](#) [5](#) [6](#) [7](#)

Trailer

[Link](#)

Photograph of director Ingeborg Jansen

[Link](#)

QUOTES

"I was never very explicit, I felt it wasn't my place to be. I was a presenter, not an activist or warrior. And then that episode with Simek came along and it all became clear: I just had to speak out, otherwise I wasn't being honest with myself. If you tell your children to always stand up for themselves, you must set a good example to them of course, otherwise what's the point in being their mother? That was when the shit really hit the fan and I had the whole country against me. That's when I thought: I've really had enough of this. I'm just going to say what I think, after all, I've nothing more to lose."

"I feel I get the blame for a whole lot of grievances, as if I'm first in the firing line. It's all part of the job. I can't think of a single movement for emancipation that's been received with open arms. When women got the vote, men were so perplexed by it they presented all kinds of supposedly rational viewpoints to invalidate its significance. We're seeing that again today. New ideas emerge which those who hold fast to prevailing attitudes can't readily accept. So, I have become a symbol. You can say whatever you like about Sylvana Simons, because I'm not a person any more, I've become a synonym. Nothing more than an object for shit slinging."

"I'm either a diva which makes me stand apart, or a demon, and that too makes me less approachable. I find it fascinating how people can be so fascinated. I think to myself: is it really so difficult to accept that this is what I believe in and what I want to devote all my time and energy to? But no. Whenever someone writes about me, it's about my hairdo, my clothes, my love life, in fact about everything except my political ideals. What is so difficult about understanding what a person believes in something and wants to act on it?

"Calling someone a racist is not kicking someone in the shin. Being a racist, that is kicking someone in the shin."

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

When producer Eric Velthuis asked me if I would be willing to make a documentary about Sylvana Simons, at first I was somewhat sceptical. As someone who hardly ever watched commercial channels, she wasn't that familiar to me. I only realised she'd been a presenter for commercial music channels and was a celebrity when she started appearing as a guest on a highly popular evening talk show on Dutch television. Rather patronisingly, I remember being taken aback by the way she discussed the topics with intelligence and perspicacity. That same scepticism was apparent among friends when I told them I was making a documentary about Sylvana. Raising their eyebrows, they would ask me, "Does she really have anything to say? Isn't it just her way of grabbing the attention?" and, "Doesn't she over-exaggerate a bit with all that fervent anti-Black Pete stuff?" I no doubt harboured similar doubts as part of my own initial scepticism. Since then, I've been asking myself totally different questions. Is it not so that Sylvana's message - that white Dutch people hold a privileged position - rests uncomfortable with my white friends and me? So are we not simply shooting the messenger? Why does Sylvana instil so much hostility and loathing, to the point where she is inundated with hate mail every day? What stops her from backing off, and what does it tell us about present-day Dutch society when it responds to her in this way?

For the documentary, we filmed Sylvana on the campaign trail to get elected onto the Amsterdam city council with her BJJ1 party. We were given full access – Sylvana had taken the bold decision to give me a free hand as director, even allowing us to capture more hapless or unflattering scenes on camera. The result is a documentary that - from a neutral standpoint - provides the viewer with an opportunity to witness Sylvana during this specific period from the "inside", giving an insight both into what she has to say and into how people react to her. Hopefully the documentary portrays a somewhat different picture of Sylvana, giving viewers the chance to ask themselves what they think of her and how this relates to the public response she invokes. And whilst Sylvana argues in favour of dialogue, the overwhelming response to her message of equality and anti-racism seems to be one of indignant outrage. During its making, I had to think back to a remark made by the American writer James Baldwin, about whom the documentary 'I Am Not Your Negro', came out last year:

"What white people have to do is try to find out in their hearts why it was necessary for them to have a nigger in the first place. Because I am not a nigger. If I'm not the nigger here, and if you the white people invented him, then you have to find out why."

Why is there so much aversion to Sylvana? Whilst we were filming and became closely bound up in her everyday existence, my sympathy for and compassion with Sylvana grew. What she stands for - a society in which everyone counts equally and is given the same economic opportunities - is a message that should be welcomed in these times of growing inequality. Instead, the individual man or woman is attacked

and Sylvana is trashed in the same unfettered way as she herself sometimes places her own message in the spotlight. Of course, Sylvana can be exceptionally critical, sometimes ruthlessly so, when it comes to issues close to her heart, such as racism and discrimination. But isn't this pit-bull-like resoluteness exactly what is required to take on the fight against a deep-rooted status quo? And hasn't Sylvana become tougher and fiercer too perhaps, in the face of the frequently distasteful and deeply insulting attacks she has to endure?

Part of the Dutch viewing public will shun this documentary from the very outset. But for those who do decide to watch it, I secretly hope that they will find compassion for this woman who, simply by expressing her opinion, has become the object not only of adoration, but deep loathing and hatred too. And that they too ask the same question as me, in the words of James Baldwin: Why is it seemingly necessary for us to have a Sylvana?

DIRECTOR'S FILMOGRAPHY

Ingeborg Jansen (Amsterdam, 30 June 1965) graduated from the Dutch National Film and Television Academy in 1991. Since then she has been working as an independent director of documentaries, mainly for the Dutch public television channels. Her documentaries have won several prizes at international festivals. Ingeborg Jansen lives in Rotterdam. A selection of her work:

SYLVANA, DEMON OR DIVA EO / KVFilms (90 min) Bold, black and beautiful: since former TV-show host Sylvana Simons started speaking out against racism, part of the Dutch public has deeply resented her. As she campaigns for a seat on the Amsterdam city council, reactions are mixed and fierce. *Première at IDFA 2018*

FORGIVE ME MY DEBTS NCRV Dokument / Een van de Jongens (55 min) In a courtroom in The Hague, people burdened by huge amounts of debt apply to get onto a special debt restructuring scheme, which enables them to clear their debts. Each applicant tells his or her own story about how their financial problems came about. The judges offer them a gateway to a better future, it now all depends on them. *Dutch Film Festival 2017, theatre tour through the Netherlands*

GREEK WINTER IKONDocs / Een van de Jongens (58 / 70 min) A brother and sister run their joint business selling heating oil in Thessaloniki, in the middle of the Greek economic crisis. What happens to solidarity when everybody's survival is at stake? *IDFA Dutch competition 2016, Thessaloniki Documentary Film Festival, Göteborg Film Festival, American Film Institute, Washington, 2016.*

IN DEBT BOS/ Volya Films 2015 (58 min) The proceedings in a courtroom where people with major debts are evaluated: are they eligible for a clean slate from the government or not? *Dutch Film Festival 2015.*

ALMOST 18 HUMAN / IE films 2012 Documentary (75 min) Portrayal of three juveniles in youth detention, suspected of and then convicted for violent robberies, in custody and 'treatment' and after their release. *IDFA Competition for Dutch Documentaries 2012*

CHICAGOBLOCK, STORIES FROM THE ELEVATOR Holland Harbour/IKON/ Mediafonds 2008 (65 min) It all starts in the elevator of a huge block of flats on the dilapidated 'left bank' of the Belgian city of Antwerp. By meeting the people who live there, the camera tells the unsuspecting love stories of several of the building's residents. *Best Documentary International 1001 Documentary Film Festival Istanbul, shown at the 25th Kasseler Docfest, Dutch Film Festival 2009, Festival du Film Independent Bruxelles 2008*

IN THE SHADOW OF A MOSQUE Holland Harbour / HUMAN / 2008 & 2010 (55 & 60 min)
Centring on the construction of a huge mosque close to the Feyenoord football stadium 'De Kuip', the film records casual conversations of the people living and working around it, speculating on the progress of the building work and the effect of the mosque on their neighbourhood. Updated in 2010 when the mosque was finally completed. *Nomination for Best Documentary Moment of 2008 "De wereld draait door", Dutch Film Festival competition 2008.*

JAMILA Holland Harbour / RMF/ Filmfonds 2005 (17 min) Teenager Jamila has a growing conflict with her father. She is a talented football player and he, a devout muslim, allows her to play, because she agrees to wear her headscarf on the field. But now her father wants her to play with her legs covered too... 'Golden Cat Award' *Best Documentary Izmir, Turkey, 2006, shown as pre-film in Dutch national cinemas 2006.*

A DIFFERENT CLASS Holland Harbour/ RMF/ Mediafonds/NCRV 2004 (4 x 25 min) 4-part youth documentary series with short animation sequences, in which each episode focuses on a child from a specific faith school swapping places with a child from a secular state school. *Dutch youth television 2005, Best Documentary Series Documenta Madrid 2004, 1st Prize Auburn International Children's Film Festival, Sydney 2004*

THE DAY I DECIDED TO BE NINA Lemming Film/ Mediafonds/ VPRO 2000 (12 min)
Much awarded short youth documentary on Guido, an 11-year-old boy who'd much rather be a girl and indeed feels like a girl. *Prix Jeunesse Best Children's Documentary 2002, Special Prix Jeunesse Best Controversial Childrens' Documentary of the last 50 years 2012, 1st Prize Oberhausen Short Film Festival 2002, Children's Programs Golden Gate Award San Francisco 2002, 1st Prize Auburn International Children's Film Festival, Sydney 2002*

FILMOGRAPHY KVFILMS

IN PRODUCTION

***JUDAS** (Boris Gerrets), 80 min. – Pomfret, South Africa. The last remaining inhabitants try to survive in their remote village, even though they've already been ordered to leave the contaminated zone. One day a film producer turns up wanting to know more about the controversial role they played in South Africa's troubled past. He meets with a wall of silence. In order to break this silence, he uses a biblical analogy and together with the town's residents starts a film project about Judas Iscariot. IKON/Mediafonds/Filmfonds/International co-production with France and South Africa

***KEAPING UP APPEARANCES**, (Fleur Amesz) 55 min. – The documentary follows the fortunes of a self-employed entrepreneur whose financial independence is constantly under threat. To keep up appearances, he resorts to all kinds of measures to show to the outside world he has a flourishing business. NCRV-KRO.

FILMS:

***OUTSPOKENLY DUTCH**, (John Appel) 80 min. – A portrait of the Netherlands seen through speeches made at a miscellany of events and occasions. Broadcast in early 2018, HUMAN/TELEDOC

***DEMARRAGE** (Arno Kranenborg) 55 min. Portrait of a group of cyclist friends aged between 65 and 80 who clock up endless miles on their racing bikes every week. A 'coming of the last age' documentary about men entering the last phase of their life. KRO-NCRV and Omroep Brabant, with the support of Mediafonds. Broadcast 27 June 2017.

***STAND UP AND WALK** (Sander Burger) (2017) 54 min. – A portrait of Claudia who, after 12 years in a wheelchair, learns to walk again with the aid of an exoskeleton. She is later asked to represent the Netherlands in the very first bionic Olympic Games in Zurich in a *state-of-the-art* exoskeleton developed by Delft University of Technology. KRO-NCRV, with the support of Mediafonds. Broadcast 2 May 2017.

***KILLING TIME** (2013) (Jaap van Hoewijk) – various lengths (54 minutes) *Documentary for VPRO with the support of MEDIAFONDS / Broadcast 2013. Première at IDFA 2013 – Competition for Short National and International Movie. Selected by the NPO as Dutch representation at the Emmys 2014. Various film festivals*

***I WILL NOT MENTION YOUR NAME; PORTRAIT OF TED VAN LIESHOUT** (Arno Kranenborg) (2012) 53 min. *Documentary for the NTR, 'Uur van de Wolf' with the support of MEDIAFONDS / Broadcast 20 February 2012*

***FOR ETERNITY** (Arno Kranenborg) (2012) 62 min. *Documentary for the NCRV with the support of MEDIAFONDS / Broadcast 20 February 2012*

(FOR A MORE EXTENSIVE TRACK RECORD PLEASE REFER TO WWW.KVFILMS.NL.)

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