

ITHAKA



PRESS KIT

Written & Directed by Ben Lawrence
Produced by Gabriel Shipton

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ITHAKA - Logline

The campaign to free Julian Assange takes on intimate dimensions in this portrait of a father's fight to save his son.

ITHAKA - Short Synopsis

Filmed over two years across the UK, Europe and the US, this documentary follows 76 year-old retired builder, John Shipton's tireless campaign to save his son, Julian Assange.

The world's most famous political prisoner, WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, has become an emblem of an international arm wrestle over freedom of journalism, government corruption and unpunished war crimes. Now with Julian facing a 175 year sentence if extradited to the US, his family members are confronting the prospect of losing Julian forever to the abyss of the US justice system.

This David-and-Goliath struggle is personal – and, with Julian's health declining in a British maximum-security prison and American government prosecutors attempting to extradite him to face trial in the US , the clock is ticking.

Weaving historic archive and intimate behind-the-scenes footage, this story tracks John's journey alongside Julian's fiancée, Stella Moris, as they join forces to advocate for Julian. We witness John embark on a European odyssey to rally a global network of supporters, advocate to politicians and cautiously step into the media's glare - where he is forced to confront events that made Julian a global flashpoint.

Ithaka provides a timely reminder of the global issues at stake in this case, as well as an insight into the personal toll inflicted by the arduous, often lonely task of fighting for a cause bigger than oneself.

Background on Julian Assange

Brief biography (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julian_Assange)

Julian Paul Assange (born Townsville, Queensland, 3 July 1971) is an Australian editor, publisher and activist who founded WikiLeaks in 2006. WikiLeaks came to international attention in 2010 when it published a series of leaks provided by U.S. Army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning. These leaks included the Baghdad airstrike Collateral Murder video (April 2010), the Afghanistan war logs (July 2010), the Iraq war logs (October 2010), and Cablegate (November 2010). After the 2010 leaks, the United States government launched a criminal investigation into WikiLeaks.

In November 2010, Sweden issued an international arrest warrant for Assange over allegations of sexual misconduct. Assange said the allegations were a pretext for his extradition from Sweden to the United States over his role in the publication of secret American documents.

After losing his battle against extradition to Sweden, he breached bail and took refuge in the Embassy of Ecuador in London in June 2012. He was granted asylum by Ecuador in August 2012 on the grounds of political persecution, with the presumption that if he were extradited to Sweden, he would be eventually extradited to the US. Swedish prosecutors dropped their investigation in 2019, saying "...the evidence is not strong enough to form the basis for filing an indictment".

During the 2016 U.S. election campaign, WikiLeaks published confidential Democratic Party emails, showing that the party's national committee favoured Hillary Clinton over her rival Bernie Sanders in the primaries. This led to the resignation of DNC chair Debbie Wasserman Schultz.

On 11 April 2019, Assange's asylum was withdrawn following a series of disputes with the Ecuadorian authorities. The police were invited into the embassy and he was arrested. He was found guilty of breaching the Bail Act and sentenced to 50 weeks in prison. The United States government unsealed an indictment against Assange, related to the leaks provided by Manning. On 23 May 2019, the United States government further charged Assange with violating the Espionage Act of 1917.

Editors from newspapers, including The Washington Post and The New York Times, as well as 25 of the largest US press freedom and civil liberties organisations, criticised the government's decision to charge Assange under the Espionage Act, characterising it as an attack on the First Amendment to the United States Constitution, which guarantees freedom of the press.

On 4 January 2021, District Judge Vanessa Baraitser ruled against the United States' request to extradite him and stated that doing so would be "oppressive" given his mental health. On 6 January 2021, Assange was denied bail, pending an appeal by the United States. On 10 December 2021 Britain's Court of Appeal ruled that Assange can be extradited to the US to face the charges.

Julian has been confined in Belmarsh maximum-security prison in London since April 2019

Timeline of Events (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-11949341>)

2006

- Assange creates Wikileaks with a group of like-minded activists and IT experts to provide a secure way for whistle-blowers to leak information. He quickly becomes its figurehead and a lightning rod for criticism.

2010

- **March:** US authorities allege Assange engaged in a conspiracy to hack a classified US government computer with former Army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning.
- **July:** Wikileaks starts releasing tens of thousands of top secrets documents, including a video of US helicopter pilots gunning down 12 civilians in Baghdad in 2007. What followed was the release of more than 90,000 classified US military files from the Afghan war and 400,000 from Iraq that included the names of informants.
- **August:** Two Swedish women claim that they each had consensual sex with Assange in separate instances when he was on a 10-day trip to Stockholm. They allege the sex became non-consensual when Assange refused to wear a condom.
- First woman claims Assange was staying at her apartment in Stockholm when he ripped off her clothes. She told police that when she realized Assange was trying to have unprotected sex with her, she demanded he use a condom. She claims he ripped the condom off before having sex.
- Second Swedish woman claims she had sex with Assange at her apartment in Stockholm and made him wear a condom. She alleges that she later woke up to find Assange having unprotected sex with her.
- He was questioned by police in Stockholm and denied the allegations. Assange was granted permission by Swedish authorities to fly back to the UK
- **November:** A Swedish court ruled that the investigation should be reopened and Assange should be detained for questioning on suspicion of rape, sexual molestation and unlawful coercion. An international arrest warrant is issued by Swedish police through Interpol.
- Wikileaks releases its cache of more than 250,000 US diplomatic cables.
- **December:** Assange presents himself to London police and appears at an extradition hearing where he is remanded in custody. Assange is granted conditional bail at the High Court in London after his supporters pay £240,000 in cash and sureties.

2011

- **February:** A British judge rules Assange should be extradited to Sweden but Wikileaks founder vows to fight the decision.
- **April:** A cache of classified US military documents is released by Wikileaks, including intelligence assessments on nearly all of the 779 people who are detained at the Guantanamo Bay prison in Cuba.
- **November:** Assange loses High Court appeal against the decision to extradite him.

2012

- **June:** Assange enters the Ecuadorian embassy in London requesting political asylum.
- **August:** Assange is granted political asylum by Ecuador.

2013

- **June:** Assange tells a group of journalists he will not leave the embassy even if sex charges against him are dropped out of fear he will be extradited to the US.

2015

- **August:** Swedish prosecutors drop investigation into some of the sex allegations against Assange due to time restrictions. The investigation into suspected rape remains active.

2016

- **July:** Wikileaks begins leaking emails US Democratic Party officials favouring Hillary Clinton.
- **November:** Assange is questioned over the sex allegation at the Ecuadorian Embassy in the presence of Sweden's assistant prosecutor Ingrid Isgren and police inspector Cecilia Redell. The interview spans two days.

2017

- **January:** Barack Obama agrees to free whistle-blower Chelsea Manning from prison. Her pending release prompts speculation Assange will end his self-imposed exile after Wikileaks tweeted he would agree to US extradition.
- **April:** Lenin Moreno becomes the new president of Ecuador who was known to want to improve diplomatic relations between his country and the US.
- **May:** An investigation into a sex allegation against Assange is suddenly dropped by Swedish prosecutors.

2018

- **January:** Ecuador confirms it has granted citizenship to Assange following his request.
- **February:** Assange is visited by Pamela Anderson and Nobel Peace Prize winner Adolfo Perez Esquivel.
- **March:** The Ecuadorian Embassy suspends Assange's internet access because he wasn't complying with a promise he made the previous year to 'not send messages which entailed interference in relation to other states'.
- **August:** US Senate committee asks to interview Assange as part of their investigation into alleged Russian interference in the 2016 election.
- **September:** Assange steps down as editor of WikiLeaks.
- **October:** Assange reveals he will launch legal action against the government of Ecuador, accusing it of violating his 'fundamental rights and freedoms'.
- **November:** US Justice Department inadvertently names Assange in a court document that says he has been charged in secret.

2019

- **January:** Assange's lawyers say they are taking action to make President Trump's administration reveal charges 'secretly filed' against him.
- **April 6:** WikiLeaks tweets that a high level Ecuadorian source has told them Assange will be expelled from the embassy within 'hours or days'. But a senior Ecuadorian official says no decision has been made to remove him from the London building.

- **April 11:** Assange has his diplomatic asylum revoked by Ecuador and he is arrested by the Metropolitan Police; he is remanded in custody by a judge at Westminster Magistrates Court.
- **April 12:** He is found guilty of breaching his bail terms.
- **May 1:** Assange is sentenced to 11 months in jail.
- **May 2:** Court hearing takes place over Assange's proposed extradition to the US. He tells a court he does not consent to the extradition and the case is adjourned until May 30.
- **May 13:** Swedish prosecutors reopen rape case saying they still want to question Assange.
- **June 3:** Swedish court rules against detaining him in absentia, setting back the extradition case.
- **June 12** Home Secretary Sajid Javid signs an extradition request from the US.
- **June 13** A hearing sets out the date for Assange's full extradition hearing - February next year.
- **November** Swedish prosecutors stop investigation into an allegation of rape against Assange.
- **November 25** - Medics say without correct medical care Assange 'could die' in Belmarsh.
- **December 13** - Hearing in London hears he is being blocked from seeing key evidence in case.
- **December 19** - Appears at Westminster Magistrates Court via video-link where his lawyer claims US bid to extradite him is 'political'.

2020

- **February 24** - Assange faces an extradition hearing at Woolwich Crown Court.
- Assange's representatives argue he cannot legally be handed to the US for 'political offences' because of a 2003 extradition treaty.
- **March 2** - Assange appears by video link at Westminster Magistrates Court, where he is refused bail amid the coronavirus crisis.
- **April 11** - Stella Moris, Assange's partner, who gave birth to his two children while he was living inside the Ecuadorian embassy, issues a plea for his release amid fears for his health.
- **June 24** - The US Department of Justice issues an updated 18-count indictment, over Assange's alleged role in 'one of the largest compromises of classified information in the history of the United States'.
- **August 25** - Moris visits her partner in Belmarsh prison for the first time in almost six months.
- **September 7** - Assange's extradition hearings resume at the Old Bailey. They are expected to go on for up to four weeks.
- **October 1** - British High Court Judge Vanessa Baraitser adjourned the case at the Old Bailey until January 4.
- **January 4** - Judge Baraitser strikes down US extradition bid.

2021

- **October** - British Justice Lord Burnett, sitting with Lord Justice Holroyde, hears two-day appeal from US.
- **December 10** - They rule in favour of the US and overturn the decision not to extradite Assange.

2022

- **January 24** - High Court Rules on Mr. Assange's appeal against the High Court ruling. Their finding is that the appeal is of general public importance and should be heard by the Supreme Court.

Ben Lawrence – Writer & Director

Winner of the 2020 Australian Directors Guild best feature film award, Ben's films have screened in competition at Toronto, Busan, Sao Paulo, Sydney, Melbourne, Sitges, Moscow, Sheffield, Edinburgh, Hawaii and Palm Springs festivals.

His credits include the 2018, best documentary winner at the Sydney Film Festival, *Ghosthunter* and his latest film, *Hearts and Bones*, starring Hugo Weaving, which had its international premiere at the 2019 Toronto International Film Festival.

His films have been nominated for several AACTAs, with best director nominations at the ADG awards in feature, feature documentary and TVC categories. He has also been awarded by the AWG for the best feature documentary, best feature film & best podcast categories.

Ben has directed factual series for the ABC, including the acclaimed *ManUp* series and the 4 Corners investigative series, *Exposed*.

Ben Lawrence – Credits

Hearts and Bones (2019)

- ADG Best Direction in a feature Film
- Australian Writers Guild Best Original Feature Film

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Ghosthunter (2018)

- Australian Writers Guild Best Documentary
- AACTA Best Editing in a Documentary
- Sydney Film Festival Documentary Foundation Australia Award Best Film

Gabriel Shipton – Producer

Gabriel is Julian Assange's brother.

He has worked in film production for more than 15 years and has developed a broad and deep knowledge of all aspects of the process. From a young age he has been engaged in and committed to film making and has enjoyed long and valuable associations with inspiring and successful professionals within this community.

He has been involved in productions ranging from low budget feature films and quality television drama series, through to major studio pictures. He is based in Australia, and has experience with filming on location, including in Africa, South East Asia and the Middle East.

His first project as a producer, the Imogen Thomas directed *Emu Runner* set in outback Australia, made its worldwide premiere at TIFF in 2018 and was nominated for an Australian AACTA award in 2019. His next project, the Arabic language *Farah* was shot in Lebanon and is currently in post production in London and due for release in 2021.

Gabriel Shipton – Credits

Farah (2022- Arabic)

- Release Schedule for 2022

Emu Runner (2018)

- ADG Best Nominated Best Direction Feature under \$1m(Nominated)
- AACTA Best Indie Film (Nominated)
- Hamburg Film Festival Michel Award (Nominated)
- Adelaide Film Festival International Feature Award (Nominated)

Brian Eno – Composer

Brian Eno - musician, producer, visual artist, activist. First came to international prominence in the early '70s as a founding member of British band, Roxy Music. His visionary production includes albums with Talking Heads, Devo, U2, Laurie Anderson and Coldplay, whilst his long list of collaborations include recordings with

David Bowie, David Byrne, Grace Jones, Karl Hyde, James Blake among many. His visual experiments with light and video continue to parallel his musical career with exhibitions all over the globe.

To date he has released over 30 albums of his own music, exhibited extensively as far afield as the Venice Biennale and the sails of the Sydney Opera House and is a founder-member of the Long Now Foundation, a trustee of Client Earth, and Patron of Videre Est Credere. His latest album with brother Roger, "Mixing Colours" was released on Deutsche Grammophon earlier this year.'

Producer's Notes

In August 2019 I went to see Julian at Belmarsh prison, Julian was on suicide watch housed in Health wing of UK Harshes Prison HMP Belmarsh on the outskirts of London. I visited Julian many times over the years, whether it was at Ellingham Hall where he was under house arrest, or in his refuge at the Ecuadorian embassy, but this visit was different.

I left the prison that day with a feeling that Julian's life was hanging by a thread and I might not see him again I had to do something more. My father John Shipton had been travelling around Europe advocating for Julian, and in Johns Journey we found our basic premise for *Ithaka* a father fighting for his son. In our hyper-partisan age, truth is often the victim of political convenience, transparency and freedom to communicate are fought for by the millimetre. *Ithaka* is also about our right to know what is being done in our names.

By following a family at the heart of the largest press freedom case this century, *Ithaka* will bring you on an unforgettable behind-the-scenes journey that will leave you questioning what you thought you knew about the world we inhabit today.

Ithaka shows the lengths the richest and most powerful nations in the history of the world will go to, to hide their crimes. *Ithaka* hits at the heart of how press freedoms and our right to communicate is being slowly degraded before our very eyes.

Production Credits

- Written and Directed by Ben Lawrence
- Produced by Gabriel Shipton
- Director of Photography Niels Ladefoged
- Editor Karen Johnson
- Producer Adrian Devant
- Original Music by Brian Eno
- **Participants**
 - John Shipton
 - Stella Moris
 - Ai Weiwei
 - John Pilger

Technical Info

Country of Production:	Australia
Runtime:	114 min
Format:	DCP (25fps), colour
Aspect Ratio:	1.85
Sound:	(5.1 surround)