

DEAR LARA Powerful Social Justice Documentary to World Premiere at Santa Barbara International Film Festival February 6

The time has come to put the lives of survivors above the protection of power as filmmaker & world-renowned violinist Lara St. John debuts DEAR LARA trailer

SANTA BARBARA, CA, UNITED STATES, February 6, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- A fearless and moving documentary feature film, [Dear Lara](#), from director and world-renowned violinist Lara St. John, makes its world premiere at the Santa Barbara International Film Festival ([SBIFF](#)) tonight February 6, 2026. The screening will be directly followed by a panel Q&A with filmmaker St. John and many of the featured documentary subjects in the film. St. John has performed and recorded internationally with orchestras including the Cleveland Orchestra, Philadelphia Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony and Royal Philharmonic and has been featured in People, U.S. News and World Report, NPR's All Things Considered, the BBC, CBC and CNN.

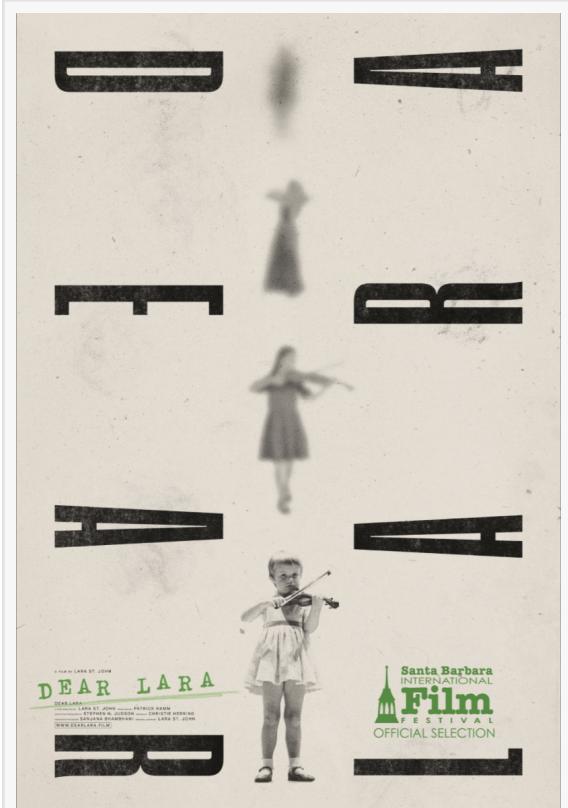
This deeply personal documentary exposes decades of sexual abuse and institutional complicity in the classical music world and serves as a true call to action. Dear Lara is the directorial debut from filmmaker St. John, with cinematography by St. John and Patrick Hamm (PBS POV: "Who I Am Not," "This Rain Will Never Stop"). It was produced by Patrick Hamm, with co-producer Christie Herring (PBS:

"The Campaign"; Hulu: "The Big Scary 'S' Word"), consulting producer Christy McGill ("Pasang: In the Shadow of Everest," "Ai Weiwei: Yours Truly") and executive producer Stephen H. Judson. The film was edited by Herring and features original music by St. John. Blood Sweat Honey will be handling sales for the film.



I never set out to become a filmmaker. I set out to tell the truth."

Lara St. John



Dear Lara - Poster

"I never set out to become a filmmaker. I set out to tell the truth. For most of my life, I kept quiet

about the sexual assault I endured as a child. When I finally went public decades later, I thought I might find closure. Instead, I was flooded with messages from other survivors – students, colleagues, musicians from around the world – all sharing similar stories. The scale of silence and institutional complicity was staggering. Music was my voice even before I spoke. With Dear Lara, I'm using that voice to help others reclaim theirs," states filmmaker St. John.

The story begins in 2019, when acclaimed violinist Lara St. John first speaks out about the sexual assault she endured as a 14-year-old student at the elite Curtis Institute in Philadelphia. After her story is published in The Philadelphia Inquirer, she is flooded with letters and outreach from fellow survivors.

Determined to make those voices heard, St. John travels across North America and Europe to meet others who, like her, were failed by the very organizations meant to protect them. As these personal accounts accumulate, a pattern emerges of institutions shielding predators at the expense of the vulnerable. Blending unflinching testimony, investigative rigor and a haunting original score, the film exposes ingrained practices of harm and cover-ups, rooted in power, silence and the worship of reputation over justice. Featured documentary film subjects include:

Robie Brown, Lisamarie Vana, Mascha van Sloten and Zeneba Bowers (violinists), Katherine Needleman (acclaimed oboist and advocate), Heather Bird (double bassist), Samuel Schultz (opera singer), Scott St. John (violinist and Lara St. John's brother), Marci Hamilton (founder of Child USA), Anne Midgette (veteran arts journalist – The Washington Post, The New York Times), Sammy Sussman (investigative journalist – New York Magazine, The New York Times, VAN Magazine, Michigan Daily) and Okke Westdorp (director of the Amsterdam Conservatorium).



Dear Lara - Film Still. Protest in Philadelphia



Dear Lara - Film Still. Playing Violin



Dear Lara - Film Still. Inquirer Pile

As we have seen, the ranks of the powerful, from governments to the hallowed halls of classical music, continue to protect sexual predators and punish victims. Only the immense courage of those victims who choose to speak out can bring true justice, with the help of public exposure.

Dear Lara is well positioned to offer support for survivors through screenings, panels and strategic partnerships. It amplifies survivor-led efforts to reform relevant laws through its partnership with ChildUSA, a legal advocacy organization focused on civil rights and institutional accountability. And it can promote institutional accountability by partnering with student groups and faculty allies to organize screenings at conservatories and music programs. The film seeks to serve as a catalyst for action and prompt serious review of school policies, reporting procedures and institutional culture – pushing toward a higher standard of accountability. For more information on legislation, survivor support networks and ways to get involved, visit www.dearlara.film.

EVENT NOTE: St. John will perform a brief LIVE concert following our Sunday, February 8th 3pm screening.

About Lara St. John

Lara St. John is a violinist who has performed as soloist with major orchestras around the world for more than four decades. In 2019, after publicly revealing her assault at age 14 by her teacher at the Curtis Institute, she became a leading advocate for accountability and justice in classical music. Since then, she has spoken at rallies, in the press and through formal testimony – including before the Pennsylvania House Judiciary Committee – in support of survivors and legislative reform. With Dear Lara, she turns the camera on her own story and those of many others to expose the patterns of abuse and complicity that have long gone unchallenged in the world she knows so well. Lara began playing violin at age 2 and made her first solo appearance with orchestra at 4. Her European debut took place at age 10. Described as a “high-powered soloist” by The New York Times and “something of a phenomenon” by The Strad, she has performed internationally and has frequently appeared on the covers of major music publications. In 1999, Lara founded Ancalagon Records – the first independent classical label of its kind. She has released over 20 albums and composed and performed the film’s original score. Her many honors include a Juno Award for Classical Album of the Year (2011), Best Music Video at the Toronto International Short Film Festival (2017), and her investiture in the Order of Canada (2020) for “service to society and innovations that ignite the imagination.” Dear Lara is her directorial debut.

Social Media (@dearlaradoc)

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/@DearLaraFilm>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/dearlaradoc/>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/dearlaradoc/>

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