



*Mission of Mermaids. A Love Letter to the Ocean*

a film by Susan Cohn Rockefeller

produced in association with Oceana

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## SHORT SYNOPSIS

*Mission of Mermaids*, Susan Cohn Rockefeller's latest and most personal documentary, represents both the spectacular beauty and current plight of the world's ocean. Subtitled "A love letter to the ocean," the film uses the archetype of the mermaid, a mythical creature that is evocative of the ocean's beauty and mystery, to bring the audience into the intimate world of the seas, rekindle an appreciation and love for them, and awaken the audience to the urgent need to respect and care for them before it's too late.

## LONG SYNOPSIS

Our ocean is in trouble. Oil spills, overfishing, ocean acidification, plastic pollution and jellyfish proliferation are among some of the worst signs of the devastation to its ecosystem.

Susan Cohn Rockefeller's latest and most personal documentary, *Mission of Mermaids* (MOM), explores the filmmaker's love of the ocean via the guidance of the much-cherished mythical mermaid. Using her archetype, the film presents a poetic ode to the ocean as well as a plea for its preservation.

*Mission of Mermaids* raises awareness about the current state of our ocean, by reaching the hearts, minds, and imaginations of the audience through the magical imagery of the mermaid and Susan's personal narrative. The film also includes internationally renowned ocean activists such as actor Ted Danson, scientist Daniel Pauley and model/performer Hannah Fraser. MOM both honors their work and recognizes them as spokespeople for the changes we all need to make on behalf of our oceans.

The message of the film is simple and straightforward: We must take responsibility for our oceans by taking immediate action to save them. In keeping with this, MOM is a low carbon-emission production. Comprised of "found" footage from YouTube videos, scanned images, and archival, licensed, or donated footage and music, the film has a gritty, guerilla aesthetic that reflects Susan's long-term engagement in innovative, organic, and less materialistic practices.

The key message of the film is that in order to be healthy and replenish, the ocean needs rest—just as the mermaid in many variations of the myth needs time on her own, away from her human husband, to be herself. With the image of the mermaid in mind, perhaps we can be compelled to preserve the hope spots that still remain, to look upon them as spaces of regeneration.

## **ABOUT THE PRODUCTION**

Susan Cohn Rockefeller is a Board member of Oceana and the Chairwoman of the Oceana Ocean Council. She also co-produced the documentary *A Sea Change* on ocean acidification which has garnered awards at film festivals around the world and contributed to the public's knowledge and understanding of this serious issue. Inspired by this work, Susan designed a mermaid pin and wore it to an Oceana event. During an interview, she was asked about her pin. She responded that she needed to believe in the existence of the mermaid because of what she represents: Mystery and Hope.

Her husband is an avid sailor and ocean activist. Together, they love to sail and explore the world on boats. Susan is also active at paddle boarding and swimming, and is happiest when she can do these sports that bring her as close as possible to feeling at one with the water.

Susan believes the seas are a truly sacred place and that we need to regain the mystery and reverence that go hand in hand with honoring them. We must work to stop the commercialization and industrialization that is destroying our waters. By valuing the mermaid and mermen both inside of us and within our waters and engaging our collective merperson knowledge we can make intelligent and compassionate daily choices that will help our ocean rather than harm her. And by extension, will help us as well.

In line with these concerns, the film has been produced with a view to making the smallest possible carbon imprint. All the footage and most of the music is donated, "found" (online or even among personal film materials). This type of montage contributes to the film's artistic, dreamlike style, bringing the viewer more closely into the world of mystery that the filmmaker wants to evoke. To further emphasize the personal aspect of the tale, the voice over is read by the filmmaker herself and her husband. And one of the theme songs, "Dive Deep Down", is written by Susan. Finally, the film honors the women and men on land who act as real-life avatars for the oceans' mermaids and mermen—fishermen, activists, actors, artists, sailors, divers and performers, all of whom revel in and revere the seas.

The film's outreach team has begun engaging the community of ocean lovers and activists, blogging on the film's website ([www.missionofmermaids.com](http://www.missionofmermaids.com)), and through Facebook, Twitter and other social networking sites.

## **ABOUT THE CREW**

### **Susan Cohn Rockefeller**

Director/Producer

Susan is an award-winning author and documentary filmmaker whose film projects have won top prizes at many film festivals. Her film *Making the Crooked Straight* received awards at festivals around the U.S. and debuted on HBO in April 2010. It was featured by *ABC Good Morning America*, *ABC World News with Diane Sawyer*, *CNN Anderson Cooper 360*, *The New York Times*, *Newsday* and many other news organizations. The film recently won the Christopher Awards for media that “affirm the highest values of the human spirit.” Her most recent film, *Striking a Chord*, continues to screen around the US and helps to raise awareness about the healing power of music for troops and the threat of PTSD. Susan is founder and designer of Susan Rockefeller Designs, a jewelry company whose focus is raising consciousness about the environment and our world through the use of bold, hip, timeless, sustainably produced designs. She is also an active philanthropist and environmentalist. For more, visit her website [www.SusanCohnRockefeller.com](http://www.SusanCohnRockefeller.com).

### **Barbara Ettinger**

Co-Producer

Barbara’s first film, *Martha and Ethel* screened at the Sundance Film Festival and was distributed theatrically by Sony Pictures Classics. Her film *Two Square Miles* aired nationally on PBS’s Independent Lens in November, 2006 and again in January, 2007. Barbara directed *A Sea Change*, which has screened in over 50 film festivals, hundreds of community screenings around the world, and garnered 15 awards, including the 2010 NOAA Environmental Hero Award.

### **Jackie French**

Editor

Jackie has a gift for creating a compelling story from almost any footage, and combines her strong sense of narrative with a love of documentary filmmaking. She has been a highly regarded producer and editor for the past 20 years, bringing her unique visual style to many independent documentaries, as well as both scripted and verité television. Jackie’s work has been seen on *MTV*, *VH1*, *Oxygen*, *Lifetime*, *PBS*, *A&E*, *Nickelodeon*, *Style* and the *Discovery Channel*. She is based in New York City, and owns her own post-production company, Jackie French, Inc. Jackie also worked on Susan’s last film, *Striking a Chord*.

### **Gwendolyn Alston**

Associate Producer & Outreach

Gwen has produced industrial videos for businesses. She has also produced over 50 shorts about food and culture in Europe and the USA. Through her company MocaMedia, she and her sister

focus on grassroots outreach for independent filmmakers. Their projects include *A Sea Change* (2009), *Making the Crooked Straight* (2009), *Striking a Chord* (2010) *Women in the Dirt* (in progress), *Saint Misbehavin': The Wavy Gravy Movie*, *The Naked Option: A Last Resort* and *Mothers of Bedford*. They have developed successful social media campaigns, supported festival launches, created partnerships and spearheaded community screenings on four continents.

**Gaetano Licata**  
Music supervisor

As a musician, Guy Licata's experience has led him to work with Grammy award winners, Macarthur Fellows as well as platinum selling recording artists. More recently, Guy has brought his vast musical knowledge and experience to music supervision. His work can be heard in national advertisements and broadcast campaigns, but his love for bringing music to pictures is best represented in his work in documentary film.

After working with Sue Rockefeller on the HBO Documentary *Making the Crooked Straight*, Guy once again adds his touch to *Mission of Mermaids*, working alongside composer Neill Sanford Livingston.

**Sanford Livingstone**  
Composer

Composing for film since 2004, Neill "Sanford" Livingston has made it a point to innovate with each successive project. Highlights of his work include 2005, as a one half of Force Theory Productions, composing for the film *Favela Rising*, which won 24 international film festivals and was short-listed for the Academy Awards.

He went on to score the film *Jesus Camp* by Heidi Ewing and Rachel Grady, which was released theatrically by Magnolia Pictures and was nominated for the 2007 Academy Award for Best Documentary. In late 2007, Force Theory produced songs for *Manda Bala* (Send a Bullet), a film directed by Jason Kohn and which won the Grand Jury Prize for documentary at the Sundance Film Festival.

Highlights of his most recent film work includes the score for director Tomer Gendler's short film *Underwear*, winner of the Grand Jury prize at the 2009 Savannah Film Festival, director Emily Abts film *Toe To Toe* in competition at this years Sundance Film Festival and Marjan Tehrani's *Arusi*, a film that explores the conflict between Iran and the U.S. (PBS).

**Oceana**

Oceana is the largest international organization focused 100 percent on ocean conservation. Their teams of marine scientists, economists, lawyers and advocates win specific and concrete policy changes to reduce pollution and to prevent the irreversible collapse of fish populations, marine mammals and other sea life. The organization has over 300,000 members and e-activists in more than 150 countries, and campaigners based in North America, Europe and South America.