

THERE IS A MAN. A MAN WHO HAS SWUM **22,000** *miles*
OF THE WORLDS DEADLIEST WATERWAYS

A MAN THAT LAUGHS IN THE FACE OF
CROCODILES
PIRANHAS & GIANT ANACONDAS

A MAN WHO DRINKS **2** BOTTLES OF WINE A DAY

A MAN WHO HAS BRAVED THE YANGTZE | AND WILL NOW
THE DANUBE & THE MISSISSIPPI | DO BATTLE WITH

THE MIGHTY AMAZON

HIS NAME IS
**MARTIN
STREL**

but you
can call
HIM...

BIG RIVER MAN

A DOCUMENTARY FEATURE BY JOHN MARINGOUIN

SELF PICTURES PRESENTS IN ASSOCIATION WITH EAR FLOWERS FILMS

MARTIN STREL IN "BIG RIVER MAN"

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SELF PICTURES EAR FLOWERS FILMS salt

BIG RIVER MAN

AWARD WINNER SUNDANCE
FILM FESTIVAL 2009

SUNDANCE 09
FILM FESTIVAL



“I TOLD MYSELF I WOULD TRY TO SWIM THE AMAZON OR DIE, BECAUSE THE AMAZON CAN BREAK A MAN IN A SECOND. I AM A BIG MAN BUT THE AMAZON IS MUCH BIGGER”.

-- Martin Strel

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Pioneering the first environmentally friendly film release, Revolver Entertainment announces the release of BIG RIVER MAN in cinemas nationwide on September 4th 2009. BIG RIVER MAN is about Slovenian Martin Strel, who campaigns for the environment by swimming the lengths of some of the world's largest and most polluted rivers such as the Mississippi, the Yangtze and the Amazon. It will be given a 'green' release in cinemas nationwide on September 4th 2009, and on DVD and VOD (Video on Demand) in December 2009/ January 2010.



Over weight and over 50 years old, Martin Strel breaks the Guinness Book of Records with what can only be described as the longest, most dangerous swim in world history.

Strel battles through gangs, unexposed tribes, crocodiles, toxic waste, lethal whirlpools and deadly giant Anacondas, Alligators, Bull Sharks and Piranhas during his historic 5,431.34 km swim down the Amazon, drinking no less than 2 bottles of wine whilst still swimming.

Director John Maringouin captures the many dimensions of Strel's journey from his strained working relationship with his son to his ultimate aspiration to contribute to a cleaner, greener world. Environmental campaigner, world-class athlete, compulsive drinker and adventurer, Martin Strel makes BIG RIVER MAN a journey not to be missed. "There is a huge obstacle built into the concept of BIG RIVER MAN. Not only did I know nothing about extreme sports, environmentalism or swimming but no producer was willing to finance a production that had so many unknowns, not to mention that the guy was over 50 years old, fat and an alcoholic trying to swim 3,000 km of "unswimmable" water. The filmmaking challenge was hard to resist (well, maybe not totally hard)."

-- John Maringouin, Director

Notes To The Editor

Revolver Entertainment is working in partnership with Dolby and Arqiva to pioneer the first ever environmentally friendly film release.

BIG RIVER MAN will be the first feature film exhibited and released via satellite delivery in the UK.

Film distribution is a costly and environmentally damaging process that has remained largely unchanged over the last 100 years. In 2007, 516 films were released for a week or more in the UK and Republic of Ireland, an increase of 2% on 2006 and 58% more than in 1998. Revolver Entertainment is the first company to actively tackle the emission and waste issues involved in bringing films to cinemagoers and DVD buyers by avoiding chemical processing, petrol consumption and other waste by-products involved in the process.

One film print alone can travel up to 1000 miles during its theatrical lifespan. Revolver Entertainment is one of the UK & Ireland's leading 'All Rights' distribution companies, shaking up the industry with a unique approach to managing its enviable and edgy slate of Film and DVD releases.

Specialists in delivering maximum media coverage and awareness via multi-platforms, with Revolver Books and 357 Records also operating under the Revolver umbrella, they are an aggressive all rights brand marketing entity. The launch of Revolver USA in 2007 expanded this brand across the Atlantic, commencing with the release of home entertainment titles throughout the country. Forthcoming theatrical titles include The Girlfriend Experience with Sasha Grey, Sundance Award Winners Sin Nombre, Big River Man and Black Death starring Sean Bean.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

Martin is a 53 year-old overweight alcoholic, who proves that you do not need have be young and slim to be an endurance swimmer and break Guinness World Records. BIG RIVER MAN tells the phenomenal story of how one man defies convention by swimming over 5,430 km of the Amazon River, to highlight pollution in the world. The marathon swim involved physical and mental preparation to prepare him for the prospect of meeting piranhas, snakes, crocodiles and sharks along the way.



LONG SYNOPSIS

Martin is an endurance swimmer who swims rivers – the Mississippi, the Danube and the Yangtze prior to the Amazon – to highlight their pollution to the world. Martin is also a rather overweight horse-burger loving Slovenian in his fifties, who drinks two bottles of red wine a day.... even when swimming.

In February 2007 Martin Strel began an insane attempt to be the first person to swim the entire length of the world's most dangerous river, the Amazon. The Fish Man, as he was called by the local tribes, almost died in the process several times. Towards the end of his marathon ordeal his blood pressure was at heart attack level, his entire body full of subcutaneous larvae and besieged by dehydration, diarrhoea and exhaustion.



The film follows Martin, his son Borut and navigator Matthew as they travel 3,375 miles in 66 days. During this epic journey Martin suffered from blisters, sunburn, exotic stomach illness, all the while trying to avoid piranhas, anacondas, crocodiles, alligators, and man eating Bull Sharks.

Director John Maringouin set out to make an environmentally aware documentary about an eccentric, larger-than-life Slovenian swimmer. He ended up journeying deep into the oppressively remote Amazonia, following Martin and his team as they descended into a nightmare of illness and insanity.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

When I first flew to Slovenia in 2006 to meet Martin it was like traveling through time and meeting a medieval lord, or Fidel Castro in his prime. I'd first seen him in "news of the weird" on Yahoo when he swam the Mississippi but in his own country he was a legitimate and powerful national icon. On the one hand, he was the most influential figure beside the president. On the other, he was a broke music teacher and gambler. He parked his car on the sidewalk in front of the presidential palace, yet when I met him he was trying to sell a vacuum cleaner that he received as a stipend for a speaking engagement. There were wild contradictions.

Personally, I first saw him as a puffed up braggart the raw form of celebrity with a sort of typical strong man attitude. But as I spent more time with him, I started to see a clearly broken and deeply insecure child who seemed driven to super feats as sort of a drastic over compensation.

The most stunning thing I discovered, and ultimately the key to Martin's character, was the symbiotic and dependent relationship he had with his shy, unathletic, 24 year old computer programmer son Borut – also his publicist.

Borut had given up college and put his own dreams on hold to make his father's possible. He was in total control of Martin's image and is his literal mouthpiece to the world.



When I discovered that Borut was actually not just a shill for Martin Strel, Inc. but rather a fearful and frustrated son longing for the day that suicidal swimming would end, I realised that I could make a film, not just a "Discovery Channel" show about a swim through exotic places.

But of course nothing could have prepared me for the metaphysical experience of filming a man swimming the greatest and most dangerous river in the world. It was so transformative visually that it superseded the notion I had that the film had to be anything but "just swimming". The film as a documentary necessarily crosses a boundary from the traditional documentary (pre Amazon) to one that travels into Strel's psychic space.

I never bought in to Martin Strel's official "I swim for clean waters" hucksterism. I thought it was just a hook to nail some sponsors. But it was the Amazon itself that turned me into an accidental naturalist. I'd expected to see another great polluted river in crises, and deforestation on the banks without much to film. But what I got was a man swimming through the last great frontier and it changed my mind about making a film with an "environmental message".

The result is BIG RIVER MAN a film that is less about an extreme endurance feat, than a man trying to save his soul. It's less about a father and son relationship than about an extreme relationship in one of the more surreal and desperate situations imaginable. Martin Strel's Amazon swim was his last attempt at greatness, the beginning of his son's life, and an unambiguous metaphor for achieving impossible dreams.

ABOUT THE CAST

Martin Strel (AKA The Fish Man)

Strel born in Mokronig, Slovenia in 1954, taught himself to swim at the age of six. Soon after this Martin was forced to escape a beating from his abusive father by diving into a freezing river in the dead of winter. His father followed on the riverbank but despite this Martin did not stop until his father gave up and went home. This, Martin cites was the defining moment that set him on the path to becoming an ultra marathon swimmer.

When the Iron Curtain came down Martin was eager to travel. However despite having spent his life under communist rule he was shocked to discover how dirty the free world was. His home country of Slovenia is unpolluted and the waters crystal clear. This disappointing discovery was another revelation that set him on the path to raising awareness for a cleaner world.



“I swim for peace, friendship and clean water”.

Martin’s mental and physical journey swimming the world’s biggest rivers

The Slovenian public is divided in their opinion of his achievements. While most hail them as heroic and a terrific contribution to the promotion of Slovenia, others see him as a national joke and a clown. He has also been accused of being a charlatan, given that he swims with the current and because his stature is hardly athletic.

Martin responds with characteristic bluntness saying that he averages 85km a-day swimming down river, which is the same as swimming 50km a day in still water. He averages 30,000 swim strokes per day and challenges anyone to keep that up for a more than a couple of days, let alone two months.

1992: Martin first swam the river Krka (105 km) in his homeland, in 28 hours.

1993: He completed the boundary river Kolpa/Kupa (62 km), in 16 hours.

2000: He swam the Danube River (2860 km) and achieved the world’s long distance swimming record (3004 km) in 58 days. Martin was the first to swim the Danube from source to estuary.

2001: One more world record - 504 km of non-stop swimming in Danube within 84 hours and 10 minutes.

2002: Martin swam the entire Mississippi River (3885 km) in 68 days.

2003: The Argentine Paraná River (3998 km) followed.

2004: Martin tackled the Yangtze River (4003 km, the longest river in Asia, the third longest in the world) in China. This project was the most demanding to date, as the Yangtze is the most polluted river in the world. He reached Shanghai in 40 days on July 30, one day before planned.

2007: Martin swam the Amazon River, commencing on February 1 and finishing 66 days later on April 7, 2007. If verified this would be another record-breaking distance of 3,274 miles (5,268 km), longer than the width of the Atlantic Ocean.

- The Nile had been proposed as his next river, but Martin said,

“I am not going to do the Nile. It’s long but not challenging enough, it is just a small creek. The Amazon is much more mighty.”

Borut Strel (Expedition Leader)

As Martin’s expedition leader and long suffering son, Borut is the unsung hero and has arguably the biggest cross to bear of the team. As well as the emotional strain of watching his father’s life threatening endurance swims, Borut handles all the organization, marketing, press, fundraising and logistics. Borut is the engine that keeps the Martin Strel machine running.

“If you ask Martin what the most dangerous thing in the Amazon was, he would say “People”. Martin only believes and trusts completely in animals, rivers and Indians. These are the only living beings that truly understand Martin”.

Matthew Mohlke (Navigator)

Adventurer, professional poker player, author and sometime supermarket employee Matthew might seem a strange choice of navigator to guide Martin down the most dangerous river in the world.

As Matthew explains in his book *The Man Who Swam The Amazon: 3,274 Miles on the World’s Deadliest River*, “Martin had first contacted me in 2001 because he’d read my book, *Floating Down the Country*, in which I detailed my journey down the Mississippi River on a three dollar per day budget, looking for girls and a good buzz. Martin needed a few kayakers who knew the river, could give up three months of their lives, were physically capable of spending fourteen hours a day in a kayak, and would do the work for free. I guess there were only a few of us who qualified”.

Matthew quickly established himself as an irreplaceable member of the team and a trusted confidant to Martin – a role that few people in the world can lay claim to. By 2007 his role within the team had further progressed, as Matthew explains:

“I wasn’t informed until two weeks before we left that I’d be out of the kayak on the Amazon expedition. Instead, I’d been given the task of navigating and journal writing. Why me? For one, I’m lucky; at least Martin thinks I’m lucky. Second, and most important, I can find current. When I don’t find current, Martin tears into me. It’s not a pleasant experience to have Martin Strel yelling at me while boring a hole into the bridge of my nose with his eyes, so I’ve become pretty good at finding him current”.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

John Maringouin, (Director)

Director John Maringouin has made a career out of documenting the bizarre and the extreme, while showing the human side of his often outré characters.

From commercial successes such as “Jackass” to independent film, his vision remains the same, to show life in its most surreal and poignant moments. His tactile approach to documentary filmmaking transcends the genre’s traditional informational/talking head format to create something much more organic and powerful, as powerful as any narrative can achieve.

John Maringouin’s first film was the uncomfortably intimate documentary *Running Stumbled* (nominated for an Independent Spirit Award in 2008). A one time Cubist painter and an ex pimp who claims that “running stumbled is my middle name.” In 2006 John was named one of the Top 25 Faces of Independent Film by *Filmmaker Magazine*. John is working on his first feature narrative.

Olivia Newton-John (Executive Producer)

Grammy award winning and Golden Globe nominated singer and actress, Newton-John’s career shot to stardom after starring in box-office hit *GREASE* in 1978, playing the lead role of Sandy to John Travolta’s Danny. A dedicated advocate of the ACEER (Amazon Center for Environmental Education and Research) and passionate about preserving the Amazon Rainforest, it is no surprise Newton-John decided to get involved and support Martin Strel’s plight for a cleaner planet.

Molly Lynch (Producer)

Previous work in film includes *Aeon Flux*, *Starship Troopers*, *Armagedon*, and in television *The Last Comic Standing* and *The Girls Next Door*. Her background in art, editing and animation led her to documentary film. In 2003 she founded *Self Pictures* with John Maringouin to produce the hilarious and disturbing festival hit *Running Stumble* to which she also co-edited. Her film *Gucci Crackheads Battle Nilhilism*, played in Rotterdam and Buenos Aires in 2006.

Maria Florio (Producer)

Producer and President of *Earthworks Films*, Maria Florio has been an unstoppable force in the documentary world ever since her film, *Broken Rainbow* won an Academy Award in 1986. A lifelong activist, she co-produced *Murder, Spies & Voting Lies: The Clint Curtis Story*, an expose on voting fraud. She was a creative consultant on *Project Return for Chance Films*, as well as *Naked in Ashes* and *By Many Names* for *Paradise Filmworks*. Her award-winning documentary, *Tibet: Cry of the Snow Lion*, which had a wide theatrical release domestically, is currently in international release. The film exposes the truth of what’s happening to Tibetans on the ‘Rooftop of the World’ at the hands of the Chinese Communists.

Kevin Ragsdale (Producer)

In 2003, Kevin left a career in money management to co-found *Pretty Dangerous Films*, a full service film production company. At *Pretty Dangerous Films*, Ragsdale brought to life ten motion pictures including Paramount/Showtime’s horror release, *The Curse of El Charro*; Stuart Gordon’s adaptation of David Mamet’s *Edmond* starring William H. Macy and Julia Stiles; and Asia Argento’s adaptation of J.T. Leroy’s *The Heart is Deceitful Above All Things* with a cast that included Asia Argento, Peter Fonda and Winona Ryder. In 2006, Kevin founded *KNR Productions* with his brother, Rich, and continued shooting both music videos and feature films. Mr. Ragsdale’s latest feature production, *Phantom Love*, directed by Nina Menkes, premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in January 2007.

Molly Hassell (Producer)

Molly Hassell has produced over 11 critically acclaimed films to date. Hassell began her career in China where she produced Mandarin language films including Spring Subway starring Xu Jinglei and Geng Le and the documentary with MIT entitled From Hutong to Highrise.

Hassell moved back to the USA and worked in commercial production prior to continuing film production. Her credits include the acclaimed *The Heart is Deceitful Above All Things* directed by Asia Argento starring Asia, Peter Fonda, Michael Pitt and Winona Ryder (chosen by Cannes Directors Fortnight and the Toronto FF); the critically lauded David Mamet piece *Edmond* directed by Stuart Gordon starring William H. Macy, Julia Stiles and Denise Richards (shown by Telluride Film Festival and Venice Film Festival); *Lying* directed by M. Blash starring Chloë Sevigny, Jena Malone and Leelee Sobieski (in Cannes Directors Fortnight).

Hassell also worked for two years with Catfish Productions, the company which produced the Academy Award winning *Walk the Line*. More recently Hassell executive produced *The Truth About Men*, a New Zealand based comedy directed by Paul Middleditch starring Joel Edgerton, Rhona Mitra and Thomas Kretschmann, which finished shooting in November 2008. Hassell is currently in pre-production on the *Sam's Story* directed by Dutch Oscar nominee Miriam Kruishoop.

Hassell's upcoming slate includes the Johnny To remake *Exiled* which is being produced by Samuel and Victor Hadida at Davis Films; *Becoming Madame Mao* based on the book of the same name, a film she also penned; and *Slumlord* to be directed by Daniel Sullivan. *BIG RIVER MAN* is Hassell's first foray into the documentary feature world. Her other documentary producer credits include the National Geographic project *Slave Next Door*.

Roger M. Mayer (Co-Producer)

Roger is a writer/producer, film theorist and historian. His credits as a producer include *Boppin'* at The Glue Factory, *Audie & the Wolf* and the upcoming *Jack & Gillian*. He is the Programming Director and Festival Director of Silver Lake Film Festival and the Downtown Film Festival Los Angeles and was the Print Traffic Coordinator for the Sundance Film Festival and the Tribeca Film Festival.

After 9/11, he moved from New York to Los Angeles and dedicated himself to his career as a filmmaker and a film exhibitor. There he began Brooklyn Reptyle Films with Karol Ballard, Christo Dimassis, B. Scott O'Malley and high school friend, Jeffrey J. Orgill. He occasionally appears as an actor in film and television and is currently working on his debut feature film *Mother Trucker*, a semi-autobiographical account of his time in Colorado Springs ("Cocaine, teen pregnancy and Mack trucks!").

Mickey Cottrell (Executive Producer)

Executive Producer Mickey Cottrell this year celebrates a quarter century as a film publicist. He brings his own spirited vision to *BIG RIVER MAN*, adding his distinctive flair and Hollywood insider status to the project. Mickey has been instrumental in launching the US careers of such filmmakers as Bryan Singer (*X-Men*, *Superman Returns*), Gus Van Sant (*My Own Private Idaho*, *Good Will Hunting*), Phillip Noyce (*Clear and Present Danger*, *The Quiet American*) and Julien Temple (MTV Video of the Year and MTV Video Vanguard Awards).

CREDITS

Directed by: John Maringouin

Cast:

Martin Strel
Borut Strel
Matthew Mohlke

Producers:

Mickey Cottrell
Maria Florio
Molly Hassell
Molly Lynch
John Maringouin
Roger M. Mayer
Oliver Newton – John
Kevin Ragsdale

Music:

Rich Ragsdale

Cinematography:

John Maringouin

-- ENDS --

The Amazon River



The life force of the Amazon rainforest is the mighty Amazon River. It starts as a trickle high in the snow capped Andes Mountains and flows more than 4,000 miles across the South American continent until it enters the Atlantic Ocean at Belem, Brazil, where it is 200 to 300 miles across, depending on the season.

The Amazon River of South America is the largest river in the world by volume, with a total river flow greater than the next top ten largest rivers flowing into the ocean combined. It has the largest drainage basin in the world, accounts for approximately one fifth of the world's total river flow.

Even 1,000 miles inland the river is still 7 miles wide. It flows through the center of the rainforest and is fed by 1,100 tributaries, 17 of which are more than 1,000 miles long. The Amazon is by far the largest watershed and largest river system in the world occupying over 6 million square kilometers. Over two thirds of all the fresh water found on Earth is in the Amazon Basin's rivers, streams, and tributaries.

At no point is the Amazon crossed by bridges. This is not only due to its huge dimensions - but more because, for most of its length, the river flows through vast tracts of unexplored tropical rainforest, where no western person has set foot (or has swam) before.

Because of its vast dimensions, it is sometimes called "The River Sea". To put it into perspective, its length is equal to the widest section of the Atlantic Ocean, which stretches from the United States all the way to North Africa.