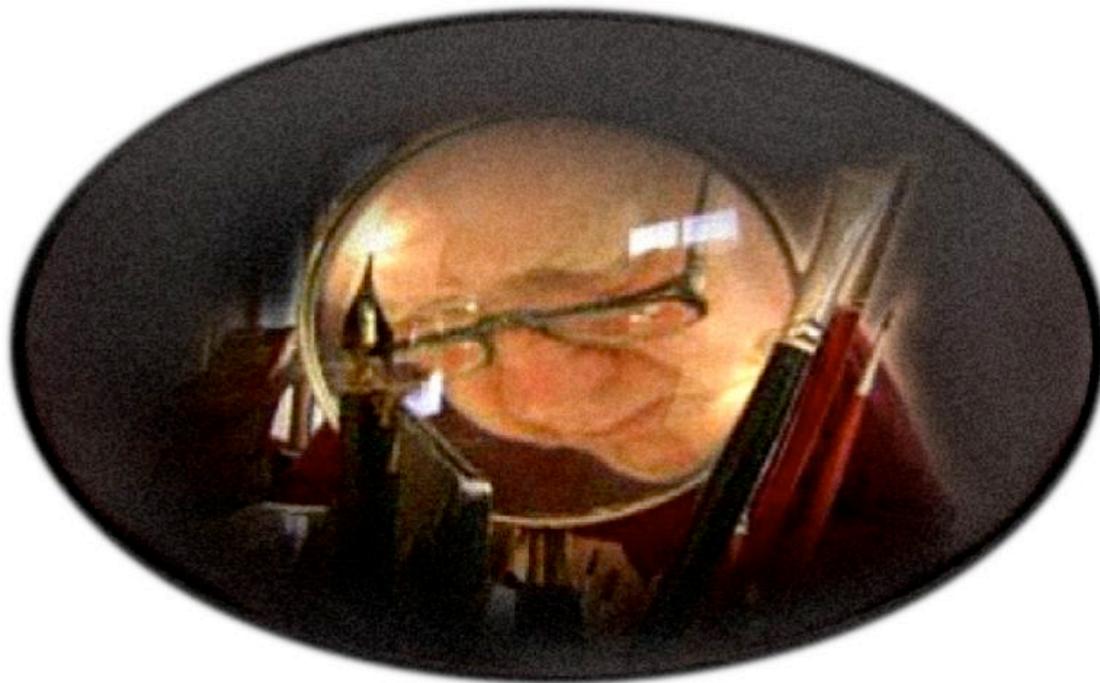


JEREMY WALKER + ASSOCIATES, INC.

GAHAN WILSON: BORN DEAD, STILL WEIRD



**A Documentary Film by
Steven-Charles Jaffe**

PRELIMINARY PRESS NOTES

Running Time: 103 Minutes

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GAHAN WILSON: BORN DEAD, STILL WEIRD

GAHAN WILSON: BORN DEAD, STILL WEIRD is Steven-Charles Jaffe's lively portrait of a mysterious American artist whose work you probably know and love. While the editorial agendas of *The New Yorker* and *Playboy* may seem at odds, both have for years regularly published the work of illustrator and cartoonist Wilson, whose often subversive, sometimes ghoulish and always rich imagery has gained him fans worldwide. While Jaffe's documentary benefits greatly by testimony from the boldface (Hugh Hefner, David Remnick, Stephen Colbert, Guillermo del Toro, Lewis Black, Randy Newman), it is his interviews with Wilson and his wife Nancy that reveal the artist's personal demons and the origins of his dark visions. Anyone fascinated by *New Yorker* folklore will be thrilled with Jaffe's access to the weekly trip Wilson makes, via Hampton Jitney, to the cloistered Midtown office of cartoon editor, Robert Mankoff. It is within this context that we learn that, even with all of Wilson's success, "rejection is the essence of the cartooning business."

MAIN CREDITS

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STEVEN-CHARLES JAFFE

Produced by
STEVEN-CHARLES JAFFE
ROBERT J. JAFFE
LESLEY CHILCOTT
MINDY ELLIOTT

Edited by
MINDY ELLIOTT

Music by
SUJIN NAM

Additional Photography by
ROBERT J. JAFFE

Executive Producer
MARI-CARMEN BURGAS

Special Appreciation:

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HUGH M. HEFNER
DAVID REMNICK
BOB MANKOFF
FRANÇOISE MOULY
LEWIS BLACK
DR. STEPHEN T. COLBERT
GUILLERMO DEL TORO
NEIL GAIMAN
STAN LEE
LEE LORENZ
BILL MAHER
RANDY NEWMAN
PETER STRAUB
ROZ CHAST
CAROLITA JOHNSON
DREW DERNOVICH
DAVID KENNERLY
ALEX GREGORY
LARRY LAUGHLIN
SAM GROSS
NICHOLAS MEYER
MIKE MIGNOLA
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MIKE LARICCIA
DAVID SIPRESS
GLEN LELIEVRE
DEVIN T. QUIN
BARBARA SMALLER
KENT WORCESTER

ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

GAHAN WILSON: BORN DEAD, STILL WEIRD is Steven-Charles Jaffe documentary feature about the extraordinary and mysterious American artist Gahan Wilson. Wilson is beloved for seeing both monsters and irony under the surface of ordinary, everyday situations and turning them into insightful, horrifically funny cartoons. Pairing spectacular imagery from Wilson's life and works, with intimate interviews that probe the past and reveal the present, **GAHAN WILSON: BORN DEAD, STILL WEIRD** celebrates the genius behind this much-loved, subversive and sly icon of the cartoon world.

Wilson believes he got off to a good start in the realm of the macabre by literally being *born dead*. He was saved only because the family doctor intervened. During his boyhood years in Evanston, Illinois, a town littered with eccentrics who went mad in all sorts of interesting ways, Wilson was drawing monsters before he could write. Even in his youth he was exploring complex situations in explosive one-panel creations.

GAHAN WILSON: BORN DEAD, STILL WEIRD not only explores Wilson's work, but also how he struggles and succeeds as a cartoonist without compromising his unique and insightful vision of the world. We learn how Wilson overcame his own personal demons through his work as well as through an immersion in eastern philosophy. His story is at once humorous, heart-wrenching, and inspirational, making a good argument for why his work speaks so profoundly to so many different people.

Every Tuesday, Wilson takes a five-hour roundtrip bus ride from his home in Sag Harbor, New York to Manhattan to sell his cartoons. This weekly journey forms the skeleton of the story. We see him among a crowd of fellow cartoonists waiting his turn to pitch his batch of *roughs* to the cartoon editor of *The New Yorker*. The stakes are high, as there are very few outlets for cartoonists to be published today. The "Tuesday Open Look," in which a parade of hopeful dreamers pitch their work, week after week, provides a behind-the-scenes look into a world rarely seen. Some cartoons are accepted, only to be later rejected. Afterwards, we see how these same artists, many quite dejected, put all the pieces back together during their weekly "Cartoonists Lunch."

As *New Yorker* editor David Remnick observes in the film, "Some cartoonists can be good by having jokes, gags. The really great ones develop a private language, a set of characters, a set of expectations, a world. Gahan Wilson develops a world. It is creepy. It is strange, but so are the worlds of Bram Stoker and Mary Shelley. But [Wilson's] is a developed universe that becomes recognizable and yet is full of surprises on a given week, and in a given drawing..."

In addition to his ongoing work for *The New Yorker*, this year marks the 50th anniversary of Gahan Wilson's work with *Playboy* and Hugh Hefner. Wilson's work continues to bridge generations; for example, he recently designed and painted a skateboard graphic for Carver Skateboards.

Q&A WITH STEVEN-CHARLES JAFFE



Why Gahan? How did you first discover him?

I discovered Gahan Wilson in 1962. I was 10 years old and my best friend had taken his father's copy of *Playboy* into the woods in celebration of his communion. As I was seeing naked women for the first time, I saw something called "The Weird World of Gahan Wilson" and as I was staring at these offbeat cartoons, my friend set fire to the field we were standing in. So in an instant I was exposed to naked women, Gahan Wilson and pyromania. Wilson's cartoons were and are still the first thing I look for in *Playboy*.

Was it hard to get access to him?

It wasn't until I had produced *GHOST* that I was able to actually meet Gahan. We became fast friends and I've been trying since 1990 to bring his work to the big screen. We currently have an animated feature screenplay based on his illustrated novel, *EDDY DECO'S LAST CAPER*, co-written by me and Nicholas Meyer, which we hope will go into production next year.

Did he and Nancy have any reservations about talking with you?

Gahan and I were in Montreal in 1999 testing a 3D animation system that IMAX developed when I proposed the idea of doing a documentary on his art and life. We shot some preliminary interviews, some of which are in the movie. I showed them to my friend Walter Murch, who in addition to editing *THE CONVERSATION*, *GODFATHER 2* and *GHOST*, had done some work on Terry Zwigoff's *CRUMB*. With Walter's encouragement, I decided in earnest to make the film.

Gahan and I developed a level of trust as friends and I proceeded to carefully begin filming him and digging into his early childhood. His wife Nancy was living in London, so it was not possible to interview her at the time. I concentrated on Gahan for over a year. I then interviewed his friends, including Lee Lorenz, Sam Gross, Peter Straub, and Gahan's stepson, Paul Winters. It was only this past year that I flew to London to interview Nancy.

I knew Gahan had stopped drinking and I saved that interview to almost the end. I came back to it several times to get the most complete picture of what he had been through. I began with, "You used to do a lot of *New Yorker* cartoons set in bars, and now it seems you do many more "meaning of life, zen" cartoons..."

You have made a career out of producing Hollywood movies. What drew you to documentary filmmaking?

My first job was to produce a documentary on boxing for John Huston and producer Ray Stark during the making of Huston's *FAT CITY*. In the evenings, John would screen his brilliant and controversial anti-war film *THE BATTLE OF SAN PIETRO* after the *FAT CITY* dailies, and it made a lasting impression on me. In the past 5 years, I grew frustrated with the business and was looking for something to really challenge me creatively and rediscover why I wanted to make movies in the first place. I had no idea that this documentary on Gahan would be the greatest creative challenge of my career.

I shot over 175 hours of interviews, which were distilled to 3x5 index cards (subject, theme, etc.) and then shuffled into one very long 3 act script -- mostly in my head. With my editor Mindy Elliott, we took these and edited them in an almost impressionistic manner, i.e. without looking at the dailies, thus forcing the question, "What are Gahan's most important and interesting statements?" I kept distilling this down until it was 98 minutes. (On this, I got plenty of input from my brother, producer Robert Jaffe, as well as from producer Lesley Chilcott and executive producer Mari-Carmen Burgas.) It's been an exhilarating and often terrifying experience. Now that I've seen the finished film, with a great score by Korean composer Sujin Nam, and a dynamic sound design by Oscar-nominated Dave McMoyler, I feel very lucky and am extremely pleased. I hope others will feel the same."

As far as I know we have never seen such a close-up look at what happens behind the scenes at *The New Yorker*? Was it hard to get that access?

Gahan introduced me to Bob Mankoff, cartoonist and the cartoon editor at *The New Yorker*. It was Bob's idea to have me film the weekly cartoonist "open look," which he felt should be immortalized and seen by the public. What a *gold mine* it turned out to be for the film. I was

particularly stunned when Gahan entered and had all of his *roughs* rejected by Bob. It did make for a very powerful end to a sequence, which reminded me of something like an Arthur Miller play with some Dickens thrown in.

Afterwards, Gahan took me down the hall to meet and interview Françoise Mouly, the Art Editor of *The New Yorker*, and wife of Pulitzer prize-winning cartoonist Art Spiegelman. On camera, Gahan pitched Françoise an idea for a *New Yorker* cover. I asked her to call me if David Remnick decided to buy Gahan's cover, which he did! When she phoned me I asked if I could go to the printing plant in Kentucky to film the cover as it was printed. She arranged that and I then followed the printing process to the newsstand, 36 hours later, as the magazines were delivered with Gahan's cover. This was unprecedented – the filming of cover art being pitched, bought, printed and delivered to the newsstand.”

After observing the cartoonists lunch, how would you describe Gahan’s relationship to his colleagues? Competitive? Collegial?

This sequence was filmed on the day I interviewed Stephen Colbert. I had heard about these "New Yorker cartoonist lunches" which take place every Tuesday after the "Open Look" with Mankoff. Gahan is revered by all of his colleagues, young and old. Actually, a number of the young cartoonists told me that when they first started pitching to *The New Yorker* and were feeling rejected, Gahan was the one cartoonist who would introduce himself, in the sweetest, friendliest manner and restore their faith and dreams as cartoonists. Because Gahan is in a league of his own, with his own unique style, and because he has so much self-confidence, discipline, and talent, he’s not competitive with anyone, except himself. He is an extremely private person, but also overwhelmingly generous to outsiders. I was exhilarated by the people who responded to my requests to be interviewed, and by the many personal connections they had made to Gahan's work.

ABOUT GAHAN WILSON

Gahan Wilson spent his boyhood years in Evanston, Illinois, which was littered with huge mansions sheltering rich eccentrics who tend to go mad in all sorts of interesting ways. After graduating from the prestigious Chicago Art Institute, he eventually succeeded in persuading highly dubious magazine editors to buy his macabre cartoons. Some of his earliest artwork appeared in the final issues of the original run of *Weird Tales*, although nowadays his work is mostly seen in *Playboy* and *The New Yorker*. His cartoons have been collected in a number of volumes, including *Gahan Wilson's Graveside Manner, Is Nothing Sacred?, The Weird World of Gahan Wilson, Still Weird, Even Weirder, Gahan Wilson's Gravedigger's Party, Gahan Wilson's Monster Party* and *The Best of Gahan Wilson*.

Wilson's cartoons and illustrations are drawn in a playfully grotesque style, and have a dark humor that is often compared to the work of The New Yorker cartoonist and Addams Family creator Charles Addams. But while both men sometimes feature vampires, graveyards and other traditional horror elements in their work, Addams's cartoons tended to be more gothic, reserved and old-fashioned, while Wilson's work is more contemporary, gross, and confrontational. It could be argued that Addams's work was probably meant to be funny without a lot of satirical intent, while Wilson often has a very specific point to make. His comic strip *Nuts*, which appeared in *National Lampoon*, was a reaction against what he saw as the saccharine view of childhood in strips like *Peanuts*. His hero *The Kid* sees the world as a dark, dangerous and unfair place, but just occasionally a fun one too.

Additionally, Gahan Wilson created a computer game titled *Gahan Wilson's The Ultimate Haunted House*. The goal is to collect 13 keys in 13 hours from the 13 rooms of a house, by interacting in various ways with characters (such as a two-headed monster, a mad scientist, and a vampiress), objects, and the house itself.

His short stories have appeared in magazines and anthologies, and were collected in *The Cleft and Other Odd Tales*, and he has edited the anthologies *Gahan Wilson's Favorite Tales of Horror* and *The First World Fantasy Awards*. Along with a number of children's books and two peculiar mystery novels, he has also illustrated the graphic works *The Raven and Other Poems* by Edgar Allan Poe, *The Devil's Dictionary and Other Works* by Ambrose Bierce and *Gahan Wilson's Big Book of Freaks*. He has presently extended his activities into movies and television and feels the best so far among those so far accomplished is the animated short, *Gahan Wilson's Diner*. He received the World Fantasy Convention Award in 1981, and the National Cartoonist Society's Milton Caniff Lifetime Achievement Award in 2005.

Wilson continues to contribute cartoons to *Playboy* magazine and the *New Yorker*. December 2007 is the 50th anniversary of work for Hugh Hefner. He recently designed his first skateboard graphic, and there are plans to produce a full length animated feature of his illustrated novel, *Eddy Deco's Last Caper*. *Eddy Deco*, would re-unite Gahan Wilson with film maker, Steven-Charles Jaffe.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

Director – Cinematographer: Steven-Charles Jaffe

Steven-Charles Jaffe's multifaceted career in film has included producer, executive producer and/or second unit director on such films as GHOST, STAR TREK VI, STRANGE DAYS, TIME AFTER TIME, NEAR DARK, and THE DAY AFTER. Jaffe studied playwriting with Pulitzer Prize-winning author William Inge, participated in acting classes taught by the renowned Sandy Meisner. Producer Ray Stark gave Jaffe his first professional assignment: to produce a documentary on boxing, during the making of John Huston's FAT CITY. Jaffe worked with Huston again on John Milius' THE WIND AND THE LION. With Milius, Jaffe developed the screenplay for Steven Spielberg's 1941. Jaffe moved up to Associate Producer on DEMON SEED, based on Dean Koontz's novel, which starred Julie Christie. He was Associate Producer on TIME AFTER TIME, directed by Nicholas Meyer.

Jaffe co-wrote and produced the cult favorite, MOTEL HELL, a horror spoof that combined Grand Guignol with deadpan humor. Jaffe was reunited with Nicholas Meyer on THE DAY AFTER, as Second Unit Director. Extremely controversial, disturbing and highly successful, THE DAY AFTER had the largest single viewing audience of any made for TV movie in broadcast history.

Impressed by Jaffe's work, Billy Wilder and Franklin Schaffner sponsored him into the Director's Guild. Paul Verhoeven hired Jaffe as Second Unit Director in Spain on his medieval epic, FLESH AND BLOOD. Jaffe then produced Kathryn Bigelow's critically applauded, NEAR DARK, the first of several creative collaborations with Bigelow. Following NEAR DARK, Jaffe produced THE FLY II for Mel Brooks. He was Executive Producer and Second Unit Director on GHOST. Collaborating again with writer-director Nicholas Meyer, Jaffe produced, as well as directed second unit, on STAR TREK VI, THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY. James Cameron signed Jaffe to produce STRANGE DAYS with Kathryn Bigelow directing.

Among the honors his films have earned are five Academy Award nominations for GHOST, including Best Picture. GHOST won Oscars for Best Original Screenplay and Best Supporting Actress. It also received four Golden Globe nominations, and won The People's Choice Award for Best Picture. An avid photographer, Jaffe's photo of Phil Stern is one of the centerpieces of the book "A Day in the Life of Hollywood."

GAHAN WILSON: BORN DEAD, STILL WEIRD, is an extreme departure for Jaffe from producing big budget productions, to the challenges of independent, self-financed, movies. "The idea was to bring what I knew from large scale film making, photography, and years of directing second unit, to a two person crew," (Jaffe, and his brother, Robert J. Jaffe, who shot B-Camera,) "and see if a candid, personal exposé on the mysterious cartoonist, known as the "Master of the Macabre," Gahan Wilson, could have the sensibilities of an A+ feature film, but for a fraction of the cost. " What was supposed to be a simple project, taking less than a year, ended up taking three years to complete, with over 175 hours of footage, which had to be distilled to 98 minutes, without transcripts. "There's an advantage in shooting the interviews yourself as well as directing, since you have an intimate eye contact with your subject. Most of what is said that's important is obvious as it is being filmed, since the information is going directly to your brain as opposed to having the luxury of a crew to do everything for you." Clearly, GAHAN WILSON: BORN DEAD, STILL WEIRD, marks a return to the 'hands on' cinema that first attracted Jaffe to making films. "It's definitely the greatest creative challenge I've had in years." Jaffe has been

a fan of Gahan Wilson's work since 1962 when he discovered Wilson's cartoons in Playboy magazine.

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER – MARI-CARMEN BURGAS

Mari-Carmen Burgas began her film career in 1965 working on David Lean's DOCTOR ZHIVAGO. She went on to participate in such productions as PATTON, THE GREAT WHITE HOPE, PAPILLON, THE WIND AND THE LION, and WHO'LL STOP THE RAIN, among many other works. She has also adapted and translated plays such as THE ROCKY HORROR SHOW, GODSPELL, and A DAY IN THE DEATH OF JOE EGG.

PRODUCER / ADDITIONAL PHOTOGRAPHY - ROBERT J. JAFFE

Robert Jaffe has collaborated with Steven-Charles Jaffe on several film projects, beginning with a Super-8 movie for the USC French department, "DEMON SEED" for MGM which Robert adapted from a novel by Dean Koontz, "MOTEL HELL" which he and Steven-Charles wrote and co-produced for United Artists. Robert also wrote and produced "NIGHTFLYERS" for Vista films, adapted from a novella by George R. R. Martin. Robert began his motion picture career in the literary department of Creative Management Associates (now ICM.) He went on to work as a story editor for Camp Hill Entertainment and Vista films. In addition to film projects, Robert has directed a number of critically acclaimed plays, including work by Jean Claude Van Itallie, Harold Pinter and Sam Shepard. In front of the camera, Robert appeared in films such as EVERYTHING YOU WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT SEX, BUT WERE AFRAID TO ASK, FUZZ, THE MECHANIC, THE MAGNIFICANT SEVEN RIDE, MAID TO ORDER and HONEY I JUST BLEW UP THE KIDS.

PRODUCER / EDITOR - MINDY ELLIOTT

Mindy Elliott's interest in film is complementary to her early work in theatre as an actor and director, and in education as a teacher of English and Drama. Mindy began her film career assisting director George Cosmatos on TOMBSTONE. She went on to assist director John Schlesinger, and was inspired to pursue editing during the 25th Anniversary restoration of MIDNIGHT COWBOY. Her interest in editing deepened while assisting Steven-Charles Jaffe on Kathryn Bigelow's STRANGE DAYS.

While working on STRANGE DAYS, Mindy met Howard E. Smith A.C.E., and later assisted Smith on James Foley's THE CORRUPTOR, Matt Dillon's CITY OF GHOSTS, David Goyer's BLADE:TRINITY, and David Ellis' SNAKES ON A PLANE. Mindy also assisted Conrad Smart on Goyer's television pilot "Threshold," and has edited a number of short films. Other projects include editing Michie Gleason's THE ISLAND OF THE MAPMAKER'S WIFE, and TIME-TRIED, PANIC-TESTED, a documentary about a ruinous and scandalous bank failure in the small coal-mining town of Keystone, West Virginia.

PRODUCER – LESLEY CHILCOTT

Lesley Chilcott started her career at MTV Networks working on large multi-camera shows such as the “Video Music Awards”, “Half-Hour Comedy Hour”, “MTV 10”, and various music specials. She was also part of the creation of the first “MTV Movie Awards”. She left MTV with its then Vice-President of Production to launch Tenth Planet Productions. After Tenth Planet, Lesley moved on to producing music videos and commercials. As a seasoned commercial producer of eleven years, Lesley has produced hundreds of commercials for such distinguished directors as the Brothers Strause, Big TV, Scott Burns, Kevin Donovan, Chris Hooper, Joe Public, Erich Joiner, Bob Kerstetter, Marc Klasfeld, Jim Manera, Bennett Miller, Hank Perlman, Joe Pytka, Brett Rattner, Matthew Rolston, Tom Routson, Baker Smith, and Stacy Wall. Lesley also freelance produces for several ad agencies.

Lesley is part of the Detroit Project, an action campaign that promotes hybrid and fuel-efficient vehicles. She has produced several commercials for the Detroit Project that have helped illustrate the irony of how driving gas guzzling SUVs makes us even more dependant on oil. Lesley was a producer of AN INCONVENIENT TRUTH last year, which won the Academy Award for Best Documentary. She has two documentaries currently shooting. In addition, Lesley founded the non-profit Unscrew America which launches in October.

COMPOSER – SUJIN NAM

A film composer and pianist, Sujin Nam's musical career began with heavy classical training. Born in Seoul, South Korea, she started playing piano when she was four. Nam later moved to New York City and studied music at The Mannes College of Music. She received her master's degree at University of North Texas, where she studied passionately jazz performance, arranging, classical piano performance, conducting and composition. With her musically diverse academic background, she continued her studies at University of Southern California, this time in film scoring which enabled her to study with such legendary film composers in the history of film music as Elmer Bernstein, Leonard Rosenman, and David Raksin.

Her first Hollywood film project was ENTRAPMENT (music by Christopher Young) in 1998 as a score coordinator. As a score coordinator or orchestrator, Nam has worked on such films as *SPIDERMAN 2*, *SPIDERMAN 3*, *THE GRUDGE*, and *THE HURRICANE*. She has worked closely with such film directors as Norman Jewison, Curtis Hanson, Sam Raimi and Jon Amiel on films produced by a range of studios including 20th Century Fox, Universal, Paramount, Columbia, MGM, and Miramax. As a composer, Nam has worked with a number of great international musicians and orchestras for film and TV projects. Her diversity in musical styles has been displayed in horror, drama, romantic comedy, and ethnic films. A recipient of the coveted Sundance Composers Lab for 2002, Nam is actively composing and conducting music for films, TVs, animations and concert music, and she also lectures in universities.