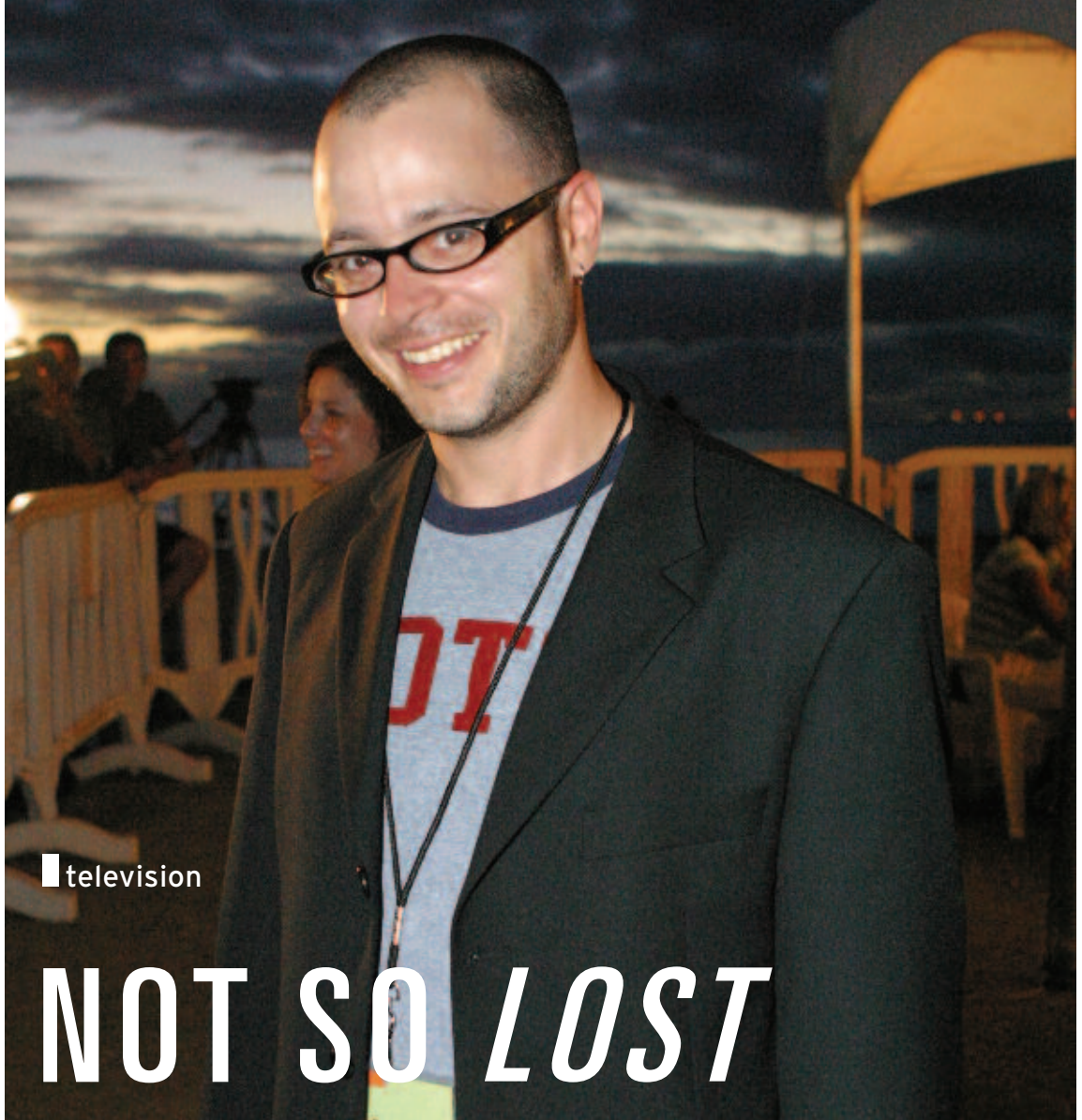


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television

NOT SO *LOST*

PHOTO COURTESY OF NAB

DAMON LINDELOF KNOWS EXACTLY HOW HE'LL END THE HIT SHOW HE CO-CREATED, BUT HE'S NOT TELLING

by Jason Hollander / GAL '07

In the late 1970s, in the days before VCRs gained ubiquity, Damon Lindelof's parents bought him some 16-mm prints of scenes from *Star Wars* because they were sick of taking their son to rewatch the film. He played the prints so much that they soon broke. Lindelof (TSOA '95) admits that he probably had an "unhealthy obsession" with the space adventure, but it was also his first experience with the escapist power of mythology. "It made me want to be a storyteller," he recalls.

So fans of ABC's *Lost* might

credit George Lucas, in part, for inspiring one of the most confounding, dizzying, and literary-infused shows ever to grace prime-time television. As co-creator, head writer, and executive producer, Lindelof will steer the series through its sixth and final season beginning in January 2010. The show, which has racked up Emmys, Golden Globes, and other awards, trails a group of plane-crash survivors on a mysterious tropical island who navigate a revolving door of obstacles—from global power struggles to personal demons and

unwillful time travel. The characters are developed through nonlinear flashbacks that meticulously connect to the overall mystery.

Though Lindelof now enjoys deity-like status among many sci-fi fans—he also produced the recent movie blockbuster *Star Trek*—the road to fantasy guru was paved through some pretty mainstream storytelling; he previously wrote for the Don Johnson vehicle *Nash Bridges*, MTV's *Undressed*, and the crime drama *Crossing Jordan*. But penning and producing the sequel to *Star Trek*

LIKE HIS *LOST* CHARACTERS, LINDELOF BELIEVES ADVERSITY IS INSPIRATION. "THERE IS PURPOSE BEHIND IT," HE SAYS.

(due out in 2011), along with developing a film based on Stephen King's fantasy Western series *The Dark Tower*, should keep him in the myth-making business for some time.

NYU Alumni Magazine recently spoke to Lindelof about life at the helm of a network hit, confusion as a motif, and what comes next.

YOU WERE BROUGHT IN BY J.J. ABRAMS (*FELICITY*, *ALIAS*, *FRINGE*) TO HELP DEVELOP THE *LOST* PILOT. WHAT WAS IT LIKE DREAMING UP THE SHOW WITH HIM?

We met on a Monday, talked for two hours, and started to get really excited about it. That Friday afternoon we had written a 23-page outline, and on Saturday morning ABC picked it up.

SO THERE WAS IMMEDIATE CHEMISTRY.

I was like, "I can't believe I'm in a room with J.J. Abrams," and he was just treating me like I was his buddy. Within a week we were writing together, meeting at Starbucks, and hanging out. The mystical side of me says we must have known each other in a former life, but I think sometimes you just meet people and immediately click in a way where it's like, "Oh...you."

YOU SPRINKLE EACH SHOW WITH REFERENCES TO LITERATURE, PHILOSOPHY, AND EVEN ANCIENT CULTURES. DO YOU EVER THINK YOU'RE GIVING THE AUDIENCE TOO MANY DOTS TO CONNECT?

I feel like for the audience member who wants to ski the black diamond, that run is available to them, but there's also a bunny

slope. And hopefully the episode makes sense. Here's the story [to the Season 5 finale]: This guy's trying to blow up a hydrogen bomb; this guy's trying to stop him. But if you want the more advanced version of the show, there's all these clues and nuggets, like Flannery O'Connor's *Everything That Rises Must Converge*. Those things are there for the superfan.

SO THERE'S A CONSCIOUS EFFORT TO MAKE *LOST* FANS DO SOME DEEP THINKING, IF THEY CHOOSE?

The show is not just called *Lost* because the island is lost or the people are lost in their lives. We want the audience to always feel a little lost, too, a little disoriented. As opposed to a cop show where you know the objective is to get the bad guy, or a hospital show where the objective is to save the patient, you don't know what the objective is on *Lost*. Our characters don't even know; they're trying to figure it out every week. Next [season] will be a slightly different experience.

SPEAKING OF WHICH, FANS AND TV WRITERS ARE CONSTANTLY SPECULATING ABOUT HOW IT WILL ALL END THIS SPRING. ANY SECRETS YOU MIGHT WANT TO LEAK TO YOUR FELLOW NYU ALUMS? [Laughs] Mum's the word.

I HAD A FEELING YOU'D SAY THAT. SO YOU'RE ABOUT TO WRAP UP THIS MONUMENTAL TV SERIES, YOU'VE JUST PRODUCED *STAR TREK*... WHAT'S LEFT ON YOUR CREATIVE WISH LIST?

It's all gravy at this point. In my heart and in my soul I am still a fanboy myself, and the only standard I ever hold any project I'm working on to is: If I were 11 years old, would I be into this?■

CREDITS

NYU CELEBRITIES STEAL THE SHOW—FROM BROADWAY TO PRIME-TIME TV

At this year's Tony Awards, **MARCIA GAY HARDEN** (TSOA '88) took home Best Performance by a Leading Actress in a Play for the bourgeois-bashing *God of Carnage*, while producer **ANDREW D. HAMINGSON** (STEINHARDT '93, '08) won Best Revival of a Musical for hippie classic *Hair*... **RAÚL ESPARZA** (TSOA '92), who also scored a Tony nomination for *Speed-the-Plow*, starred alongside Anne Hathaway this summer in the Shakespeare in the Park production of *Twelfth Night*... Actress **CAMRYN MANHEIM** (TSOA '87) returns for the fifth season of *Ghost Whisperer* on CBS, while **AZIZ ANSARI** (STERN '04) and **AUBREY PLAZA** (TSOA '05) are back in the NBC comedy *Parks and Recreation*... **LESLIE MORGENSTEIN** (STERN '97) is executive producer of two shows on The CW: *Gossip Girl* and newcomer *The Vampire Diaries*, which chronicles high school bloodsuckers... **PETER KRAUSE** (TSOA '90) co-stars in the new dramedy remake of *Parenthood* on NBC... The peacock network also debuted producer **CHARLIE CORWIN**'s (LAW '99) summer drama *The Philanthropist*, co-starring **JESSE L. MARTIN** (TSOA '91), about a world-traveling billionaire... **ETHAN PECK** (TSOA '09), grandson of acting legend Gregory Peck, reprised Heath Ledger's role in the ABC Family adaptation of the film *10 Things I Hate About You*... **JUSTIN BARTHA** (TSOA '00) played the groom-gone-missing in the surprise summer smash *The Hangover*, the latest comedy about men misbehaving from director **TODD PHILLIPS** (TSOA '94)... **MARTIN SCORSESE** (WSC '64,



STEINHARDT '68, HON '92) directed the upcoming thriller *Shutter Island*, set in a secluded hospital for the criminally insane and starring Leonardo DiCaprio and Ben Kingsley... **JENNIFER FOX** (GAL '94) produced *The Informant!*, which features Matt Damon as a bipolar whistle-blower in Steven Soderbergh's dark comedy... Greek gods will rule the cineplex with two films in the new year: director **LOUIS LETERRIER** (TSOA '96) revisits *Clash of the Titans*, while **CHRIS COLUMBUS** (TSOA '80) will helm *Percy Jackson & the Olympians: The Lightning Thief*, based on the adventure book series about Poseidon's half-human son... Oscar-winning scribe **MICHAEL ARNDT** (TSOA '87) penned Disney/Pixar's *Toy Story 3*, due out next summer... **CHRIS TAYLOR** (STEINHARDT '04), **ED DROSTE** (GAL '03), **DANIEL ROSSEN** (CAS '04), and **CHRIS BEAR** (STEINHARDT '04) make up indie rock band Grizzly Bear, now in the midst of their world tour.

—Renée Alfuso

theater

Laramie, Revisited

DRAMATIST MOISÉS KAUFMAN RETURNS TO THE TOWN THAT PUT HIM—AND HATE CRIMES—IN THE NATIONAL SPOTLIGHT

by Patricia Cohen

If Moisés Kaufman had to pick a single moment to mark his creative and sexual awakening, it would be his first theater class at the Tisch School of the Arts. He was 23 and had moved to the city from his home in Caracas, Venezuela, where as the son of Orthodox Jews he had attended a yeshiva. Each student had prepared a song, and a man with box-office biceps got up and sang “(You Make Me Feel Like) A Natural Woman.” “At first I thought he was being sarcastic,” Kaufman, now 45, recalls. When

he realized that wasn’t the case, Kaufman expected to see smirks on the faces of his classmates. Instead they sat attentive, gently nodding in time to the music. “I didn’t know you could be an artist or you could be gay,” he explains. “Or rather, I didn’t know I could be. In that class, I saw you could do both.”

Kaufman (TSOA ’89) recounts the story from behind a desk in his cluttered office on Manhattan’s Upper West Side. He adds that he did not come out to his parents until years later, noting: “It didn’t

hurt that I was very successful by that point.” He yawns and then quickly apologizes. He is exhausted. As usual, Kaufman, an award-winning playwright, producer, and director has many pots simmering at the same time. He is traveling to Missouri to direct the fairy tale pastiche *Into the Woods* for the Kansas City Repertory Theatre, a production he hopes will end up on Broadway. At the same time, he and his company are working on an epilogue to *The Laramie Project*, which the Tectonic Theater Project created after

Matthew Shepard, a 21-year-old gay college student, was brutally beaten and left to die on a fence in a small Wyoming town in 1998. It is scheduled to open simultaneously in 100 theaters across the country on October 12, the anniversary of Shepard’s death.

Laramie is by far the most famous creation of Tectonic, the collective Kaufman founded in 1991 with his partner Jeffrey LaHoste. (Another NYU theater class was the scene of their first meeting.) The company is devoted to pushing beyond the kind of

PHOTOS: LEFT © PETER KRAMER/AP PHOTO; RIGHT © KEN FRIEDMAN



ABOVE: KAUFMAN APPROACHES PLAYWRITING MUCH LIKE A JOURNALIST, ARMED WITH INTERVIEWS AND THE HISTORICAL RECORDS OF REAL-LIFE EVENTS. RIGHT: IN 2000, *THE LARAMIE PROJECT* BROUGHT THE STORY OF MATTHEW SHEPARD’S MURDER TO OFF-BROADWAY.

naturalistic and realistic stage performances with which American audiences are most familiar. Consider the genesis of *Laramie*. After Shepard died, 10 members of the company conducted some 200 interviews with local residents, which they then spent months fashioning into a play. It has had more than 2,000 productions since its off-Broadway debut in 2000 and was later filmed for HBO.

Like *Laramie*, most of Kaufman's work is based on journal-

similar features. The drama starred Jane Fonda, who returned to the stage after a 46-year absence to play Katherine Brandt, a dying musicologist determined to solve the mystery behind one of Beethoven's oddest compositions, the "Diabelli" Variations. Katherine travels to Bonn, Germany, to scour Beethoven's handwritten scores, sketches, and conversation books—just as Kaufman, a classical music fan, did in real life. The show rounded up a bouquet

“Shepard’s death resonated nationally. But what if nothing has really changed?”

istic accounts or historical records. In his view, real life is simply more fascinating than fiction—particularly those “watershed historical moments,” he says, when a culture’s inner workings and beliefs are suddenly exposed. His first play, *Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde*, was based on such a moment. For that, Kaufman relied on newspaper clippings, trial transcripts, and biographies to dramatically recount how Wilde was persecuted and jailed because of his relationship with a younger man, Lord Alfred Douglas.

Another Tectonic production, *I Am My Own Wife*, written by Doug Wright (TSOA '87) and directed by Kaufman, won the Tony Award for Best Play and the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 2004. In the play, which is based on the true story of Charlotte von Mahlsdorf, a German transvestite who managed to survive both the Nazis and the Communists, a single actor plays 35 characters. (Kaufman's parents survived the Holocaust before immigrating to Latin America.)

33 Variations, which was written by Kaufman and ended its Broadway run in May, shares

of Tony nominations, including Best Play.

At first glance, Beethoven's Vienna, Victorian London, and the American West may not seem to share much in common, but Kaufman insists that his work cannot be reduced to neat categories. As he has said before in interviews: “I am Venezuelan; I am Jewish; I am gay; I live in New York. I am the sum of all my cultures. I couldn't write anything that didn't incorporate all that I am.”

As for *Laramie: 10 Years Later*, Kaufman told *The New York Times* that he is apprehensive about returning to the town. “There had been such fervor about how Matthew Shepard's death would make a difference,” he explains. “There are hundreds of hate crimes each year, but Matthew is the one that resonated nationally. But what if nothing has really changed?” Without undercutting his own work by revealing the answer to that question, he has noted that the log fence where Shepard was tied for 18 hours before being discovered has been removed: “There is nothing there, no marker, nothing.” ■

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