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HAIL SATAN?

Un film de Penny Lane
95 mins, États-Unis, 2018
Langue : Anglais

Sélection officielle :

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Première mondiale, en compétition dans la section du meilleur documentaire américain

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HAIL SATAN?

Short Synopsis

Chronicling the extraordinary rise of one of the most colorful and controversial religious movements in American history, *Hail Satan?* is an inspiring and entertaining new feature documentary from acclaimed director Penny Lane (*Nuts!*, *Our Nixon*). When media-savvy members of the Satanic Temple organize a series of public actions designed to advocate for religious freedom and challenge corrupt authority, they prove that with little more than a clever idea, a mischievous sense of humor, and a few rebellious friends, you can speak truth to power in some truly profound ways. As charming and funny as it is thought-provoking, *Hail Satan?* offers a timely look at a group of often misunderstood outsiders whose unwavering commitment to social and political justice has empowered thousands of people around the world.

Long Synopsis

On the steps of the historic State Capitol building in Tallahassee, Florida, a handful of citizens wearing hooded cloaks and polyester robes hold a rally in support of Governor Rick Scott's proposed law to allow prayer in public schools. Chanting "Hail Satan! Hail Rick Scott!" the group's demonically costumed spokesman announces to a smattering of TV cameras that the Satanic Temple fully embraces the prospective legislation. In truth, however, these media-savvy Satanists are playfully championing religious pluralism while illustrating the hypocrisy of Scott's actions. The First Amendment prohibits the government from passing any laws "respecting the establishment of religion," meaning it cannot promote one religion over another, so any legislation opening the door to religious activities in school would have to accept not only Christianity but unpopular religions such as Satanism. Despite the event's awkwardness and low turnout, the publicity stunt makes national news and launches the recently formed Satanic Temple onto the public stage.

After a hilariously vulgar “Pink Mass” to protest the notoriously homophobic Westboro Baptist Church garners the group even more attention, the Satanic Temple officially opens its international headquarters in Salem, Massachusetts. There, less than a mile from the spot where more than a dozen innocent people were executed during the witch trials of the 1690s, the Temple’s enigmatic co-founder, Lucien Greaves, plans the group’s next public action. Joining him as co-spokesperson is Detroit artist and activist Jex Blackmore, who views Satanism as a way to directly confront injustice and corrupt authority throughout the world.

After holding a controversial black mass ritual in Boston, infuriating thousands of Catholics across the city, the Satanic Temple sets its sights on Oklahoma, where a monument to the Ten Commandments has recently been erected on public grounds. Shining a spotlight on this blatant promotion of Christianity by the Oklahoma legislature, the Temple petitions the state to add a seven-foot statue of the goat-headed deity Baphomet alongside the Christian marker. When the legislature removes the Ten Commandments monument rather than install a tribute to Satan on government property, the Temple’s clever challenge inspires hundreds of like-minded people from around the world to join their cause. Within three years, the group’s membership grows from three people to more than 100,000.

But with their numbers swelling and dozens of new chapters forming in cities across the globe, increased threats of violence against Satanists and disagreements within the group’s own ranks complicate the Temple’s work. As a complex and costly legal battle erupts over a similar Ten Commandments monument in Arkansas, Greaves, Blackmore, and their fellow Temple members struggle to adjust to the movement’s explosive popularity while maintaining the integrity of their core beliefs.

ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

For acclaimed producer Gabriel Sedgwick, the idea of making the feature documentary *Hail Satan?* began not with an interest in occult rituals, but with an abiding curiosity about the American political system. “I’m Swedish, so the complicated relationship between faith and politics in the United States has always fascinated and mystified me,” he says. “That’s because I’m from a country where that type of mixture just doesn’t exist. Bringing religion into the political arena in Sweden is entirely taboo.”

For many years, Sedgwick considered how he could make a film that explored the controversial topic in a compelling way. “Luckily, the Satanic Temple appeared on my radar and instantly spoke to my gut,” he says. “I first heard about the Temple about three years ago when they were involved in a string of news events around the country. In terms of the cross-section of politics and religion, I thought they were extremely interesting and would make a terrific subject for a documentary.”

An Ideal Collaboration

Eager to find a collaborator whose enthusiasm for the subject matched his own, Sedgwick reached out to award-winning documentarian Penny Lane. Although the two filmmakers hadn’t worked together previously, Lane’s interest in First Amendment issues made her the ideal choice to direct a film about freedom of religion in the United States.

“We met to discuss it over some tacos,” recalls Sedgwick, “and soon came to realize that not only did we want to make the same kind of film, but that there were so many more intriguing layers to this story than first seemed apparent.”

Like Sedgwick, Lane had also seen news stories about the Satanic Temple online and was intrigued by the group. “Initially, it seemed like brilliant performance art that was designed to promote religious pluralism in America, which is a topic that I’ve always cared about,” she says. “Freedom of expression and freedom of religion are very important to me.”

Upon a closer examination, however, Lane realized her assumptions about Satanism were incorrect. “I had it totally wrong,” she admits. “I assumed that the Satanic Temple members were

not in fact Satanists, but were just pretending to be in order to make a political point. The truth was, Satanism didn't mean what I thought it meant.”

Like most people, Lane grew up with the vague notion that Satanists worshipped the Devil and committed evil acts in the name of the Prince of Darkness. “I've always been a secular person my whole life, so I assumed that Satanists practiced animal sacrifices, at least pretended to murder babies, and things like that,” she says. “All of which turned out to be completely false. So Satanism was a great subject for a film because there were so many surprises for me right off the bat. That's the kind of thing I always look for when I'm searching for a story that can sustain a feature-length documentary.”

To see if they worked well together, Sedgwick and Lane decided to collaborate on a short film prior to tackling the feature documentary. “We tested our relationship by making a 17-minute short about sea monkeys for CNN,” says the producer. “It was a fantastic experience and proved that we had the same type of intellectual and artistic ambitions, so with that in mind, we enthusiastically dove into making *Hail Satan?*”

Meet the Founder

The filmmakers began by contacting Lucien Greaves, the co-founder and spokesperson for the Satanic Temple. “I wrote to him and introduced myself as a producer interested in making a documentary about his organization,” says Sedgwick. “I assured him that we wanted to craft something intelligent and thought-provoking, not just a movie for shock value.”

Greaves admits to being hesitant at first. A number of other documentary makers had approached him over the years and he'd turned them all down for various reasons. “My knee-jerk reaction was always to say no,” he says. “But I really liked Penny's previous films, and I appreciated how she took on the anti-vaccination movement when the Tribeca Film Festival attempted to screen a scientifically discredited documentary in 2016, so I thought she might be a good fit with us.”

Following an initial meeting in New York City, the filmmakers and Greaves continued to discuss the project over the next several months. “We met with Lucien many times, and slowly

earned his trust,” says Sedgwick. “Eventually, we traveled to the Satanic Temple headquarters in Salem. Once he realized that we weren’t idiots or jerks he agreed to give us exclusive access to the inner workings of the Temple.”

In addition to Greaves, the filmmakers contacted several other key figures in the Satanic Temple, including another of the group’s spokespeople at the time, Jex Blackmore. “I got an email from Penny that said she was interested in making a documentary about Satanism,” recalls Blackmore. “After researching some of the films she’d made in the past, and having a direct conversation with her myself, I became comfortable with the idea of her covering the work we were engaged in.”

Lane’s open-mindedness regarding the subject of Satanism was particularly appealing to Blackmore. “She didn’t approach us with a predetermined agenda, which is really important because it’s always tempting to twist the story of a Satanic organization in a way that’s sensational. That’s been a big problem in the past, so it was very important to find someone who’d be neutral, and I felt like Penny was that person.”

With the Temple officially on board, the filmmakers began the always-difficult process of securing funding. Luckily, they received early support from organizations including the Catapult Film Fund, the Sundance Institute Documentary Film Program, Rooftop Films, and Cinereach, as well as a grant from Colgate University. “With their assistance, and the help of others, we were able to put together the necessary development funds from a variety of sources,” says Lane. “Then, about a year and a half into the project, Magnolia Pictures came on as the major funder.”

Keeping It Real

Production on *Hail Satan?* began in the fall of 2016, but the filmmakers took their time before committing the Temple’s activities to video. “We didn’t rush in with cameras right off the

bat,” explains Sedgwick. “It took us a while to get to know the Temple and its key figures, and to strengthen the trust between us before we introduced a camera into the equation.”

Greaves granted the production extraordinary access to the Temple’s activities, but the documentary’s creation was entirely in the filmmakers’ control. “We didn’t have any say over how it would be edited, or narrated, or anything like that,” says Greaves. “We just had to trust that their interpretation would be accurate.”

Certain ground rules were agreed to early on, however. “We made it clear that we had no interest in any type of reality TV exploration of our personal lives,” Greaves states. “Also, no one in the Temple was obligated to appear in the film if they didn’t want to. To that end, we told our members to work with the documentary crew only to the extent they felt comfortable.”

Over time, Blackmore became increasingly comfortable with Lane’s commitment to portraying the Temple as accurately as possible. As trust developed between them, the normally reticent Satanist began to open up the video archives she’d amassed over the years. “When I saw that Penny really wanted to cover the broader picture of what we were doing, I started sharing all of the footage that I’d collected of the performances and actions we’d engaged in. That way, she’d have everything she needed to tell a fair story.”

While many Temple members appear on camera throughout the film, others chose to speak on the condition that their faces remained obscured. This decision made perfect sense to Lane. “To publicly declare yourself a Satanist is to invite a great deal of hatred and persecution,” she says. “For that reason, it’s not surprising that some of the Satanists in our film chose not to have their faces shown. These people have families they’re trying to protect, so we made sure that we weren’t putting anyone on camera who didn’t feel entirely comfortable with it.”

Greaves also insisted that everything depicted in the film be captured exactly as it happened, so there would be no reenactments of the Temple’s public actions, protests or rituals. “I’m probably difficult for filmmakers to work with because I’m not very accommodating when

it comes to the idea of staging anything,” he admits. “I was adamant that we weren’t going to do any of that in this documentary. It’s even difficult to get me to agree to shoot B-roll footage. Honestly, I think it makes for a much better film when you keep everything entirely authentic.”

New Techniques

Lane and her production team began *Hail Satan?* with a strong sense of what they wanted the film to be about conceptually, intellectually and emotionally. What they didn't know, however, was the story they would tell. "In my 10-plus years of filmmaking, I've never made a documentary where I didn't already know how the film would end at the beginning of the production," explains Lane. "I've never followed events as they happened over time. So, for me, the biggest challenge on *Hail Satan?* was learning how to manage that type of uncertainty.

"We knew from the start we wanted to focus on Lucien and Jex," adds Lane, "but we also contacted as many different chapters of the Satanic Temple as possible and asked them to let us know if they were planning anything we might find interesting."

As she dug deeper into the Temple's inner workings, Lane found herself unexpectedly touched by the group's passion and spirit. "Once we started interviewing members of smaller chapters of the Satanic Temple who were operating at a local level, I became quite moved by how committed they were to the work they're doing," she says.

Lane was surprised to discover how spiritually and emotionally fulfilling the Satanic Temple had become to its members. "It's helped a huge number of people who've felt like outsiders come together and form a community," she observes. "That was very moving to me on a personal level, because I've always been a secular and skeptical outsider my whole life. It made me think that my knee-jerk reaction against religion was misplaced."

A Devilish Sense of Humor

One of the many surprises that *Hail Satan?* has in store for viewers is just how funny and engaging Satanists are in their work. As the documentary makes clear, humor can be a potent antidote to anger, fear, and ignorance. "The Satanic Temple has a very important message, but they frame it in a way that's captivating and quite entertaining," says Sedgwick.

For Blackmore, however, humor and satire are much more than convenient ways to ingratiate Satanists to the skeptical public. When put to good use, humor has proved to be a powerful weapon in the battle Satanists and others are waging regarding the concept of religious pluralism. "Engaging in humorous activity helps us create a framework surrounding the issue of religious liberty in America and what that means to all of us," she says.

The ability to address serious issues in a relatable way using wit was one of the aspects of Satanism Lane found most interesting. “Although they’re not a satirical group, there’s still a lot of humor involved in their work, and that’s one of the reasons the Satanic Temple was such a good fit with me as a director. I feel like I’m on a personal mission to prove that smart movies don’t have to be deadly serious and fun movies don’t have to be stupid.”

What may also come as a surprise for those unfamiliar with Satanism are the Temple’s seven tenets, which encourage compassion and empathy, the struggle for justice, and belief in science. “At the core of Satanism is the understanding that having a sense of humor, and embracing ambiguity, and even trolling people to an extent, doesn’t mean you don’t truly believe in the things you’re fighting for,” says Lane.

Those fights often involve government officials who promote Christianity despite the First Amendment’s clear prohibition against favoring one religion over another. Although the filmmakers repeatedly requested interviews with many of these officials, none chose to participate in the film. But that didn’t keep their viewpoints from being presented.

“Every time we went out to shoot, we reached out to various people who we thought might be particularly relevant to the story, including members of the Phoenix City Council who were opposed to the Satanists’ agenda,” says Lane. “None of them wanted to talk to us, but their opinions are included in the archival news footage we show throughout the film. That ultimately provided an interesting context in which to explore the issue of religious freedom.”

An Inspiring Story

Reflecting on the two-and-a-half-year journey to bring *Hail Satan?* to the screen, Sedgwick believes the time is ripe for audiences to learn more about this fascinating and

misunderstood religion. “The Satanic Temple is thriving right now because they’ve built a community of shared ideals that are religious in nature, while separating the supernatural aspect from it,” he says. “That’s clearly something that serves a need for many people.”

Greaves says he’s not interested in whether or not audiences embrace the Temple’s beliefs after seeing *Hail Satan?* Instead, he hopes they’ll gain a greater understanding of the group’s overarching goals and philosophical underpinnings. “We don’t proselytize, so if

audiences come away from the documentary feeling like the Satanic Temple isn't right for them, to me, that's just as good as if they watch it and decide to join us," he says. "I just want them to see an accurate interpretation of who we are, and this film will give them a reasonable impression of that."

Though no longer associated with the Satanic Temple itself, Blackmore remains an active and committed Satanist, and she hopes that viewers will take the film's empowering message to heart. "To me, it's really important that people feel inspired to engage in radical actions in their own lives, and hopefully *Hail Satan?* will provide an impetus for that energy."

For her part, Lane would like audiences who see *Hail Satan?* to feel as inspired as she did while making it. "I'd love for viewers to realize that you can make a really big impact on people's lives without lots of money, or political influence, or powerful connections," she says. "With nothing more than a really smart idea, and maybe a few friends, you can change the world in some way. That's what the Satanic Temple made me remember. In the end, the most surprising part of this whole experience was discovering just how profoundly inspiring their story is."

The Seven Tenets of the Satanic Temple

1. One should strive to act with compassion and empathy toward all creatures in accordance with reason.
2. The struggle for justice is an ongoing and necessary pursuit that should prevail over laws and institutions.
3. One's body is inviolable, subject to one's own will alone.
4. The freedoms of others should be respected, including the freedom to offend. To willfully and unjustly encroach upon the freedoms of another is to forgo one's own.
5. Beliefs should conform to one's best scientific understanding of the world. One should take care never to distort scientific facts to fit one's beliefs.
6. People are fallible. If one makes a mistake, one should do one's best to rectify it and resolve any harm that might have been caused.
7. Every tenet is a guiding principle designed to inspire nobility in action and thought. The spirit of compassion, wisdom, and justice should always prevail over the written or spoken word.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

PENNY LANE (Director) has been making award-winning, innovative nonfiction films for more than a decade. Her third feature documentary, *The Pain of Others* (2018), debuted at the International Film Festival Rotterdam and went on to Sheffield and BAMcinemaFest. Her previous feature documentary *Nuts!* (2016) premiered at Sundance, where it won a Special Jury Prize for Editing. Her debut feature documentary, *Our Nixon* (2013), premiered at Rotterdam, had its North American premiere at SXSW, won the Ken Burns Award for Best of the Festival at Ann Arbor, and was selected as the closing night film at New Directors/New Films.

Lane was recently honored with the Vanguard Award at SF DocFest, a Chicken & Egg Breakthrough Filmmaker Award and, in 2017, was admitted into the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. (She is possibly most proud, however, of having been named “Most Badass!” at the Iowa City Documentary Film Festival in 2009.)

Her short films, including *Just Add Water: The Story of the Amazing Lives of Sea-Monkeys* (2016) and *The Voyagers* (2010), have won film festivals accolades as well as online popularity. Festival screenings of her works have spanned the independent and experimental film worlds, including Sundance, Rotterdam, Images, Impakt, Hot Docs, Full Frame, CPH:DOX and Oberhausen. She has been awarded grants from Sundance, Creative Capital, Cinereach, TFI Documentary Fund, Jerome Foundation, Catapult Film Fund, LEF Foundation, New York State Council on the Arts, and many other organizations. Lane is currently an associate professor in the Department of Art and Art History at Colgate University, where she lives in a very old house and shows movies in her barn. And yes, Penny Lane is her real name.

GABRIEL SEDGWICK (Producer) hails from the grim and frostbitten Kingdom of Sweden but lives in New York City, where he has produced both fiction and documentary films that have screened at festivals including SXSW, International Film Festival Rotterdam, New Directors/New Films, BAMcinemaFest, Urbanworld, BAM’s New Voices in Black Cinema, and Karlovy Vary. His productions include director Penny Lane’s documentary *The Pain of Others*

and Lanre Olabisi's fiction features *August the First* and *Somewhere in the Middle*, winners of multiple awards on the festival trail.

Sedgwick also co-produced Jeremiah Zagar's feature-length documentary *Captivated: The Trials of Pamela Smart*, which premiered in competition at Sundance in 2014, and line produced Sara Jordanö's *Kiki*, which premiered in competition at Sundance in 2016. On the shorts side, he produced Lane's sea-monkey documentary *Just Add Water* for CNN Films and Great Big Story, which garnered massive online popularity with over six million views and counting, and Lane's recent *Nellie Bly Makes the News* for the Center for Investigative Reporting. When not making movies, Sedgwick can be heard emitting assorted strange noises in the Brooklyn-based band Odd Rumbblings.

AMY FOOTE (Editor) is a documentary editor based in Brooklyn. Her editing credits include *The Work* (Grierson Award for Best Single Documentary, Grand Jury Prize SXSW 2017); Peabody award winner *Mavis!* (HBO); *1964* (PBS' "American Experience"); the Emmy®-nominated and James Beard Award-winning film *A Matter of Taste: Serving Up Paul Liebrandt* (HBO, BBC); *For Once in My Life* (PBS Independent Lens, SXSW Audience Award 2010, IDA Best Music Documentary) and the Emmy-nominated film *Finishing Heaven* (HBO).

AARON WICKENDEN (Editor) is a multiple Emmy- and ACE Eddie-nominated filmmaker with nearly two decades of experience as an editor. He is known for bringing a tireless work ethic and playful aesthetic to each of his creative collaborations, including the Oscar-nominated *Finding Vivian Maier* and the 2018 releases *Won't You Be My Neighbor?*, *Generation Wealth*, and *They'll Love Me When I'm Dead*. His documentary career began via a 2002 internship at Chicago's Kartemquin Films, which led to finding a mentor in director Steve James. Wickenden would go on to spend a decade learning from and ultimately co-editing two features with James: *At the Death House Door* and *The Interrupters*.

In 2014 Wickenden was recruited by Oscar® winner Morgan Neville and Grammy®-winning author and filmmaker Robert Gordon to co-edit their film *Best of Enemies: Buckley vs. Vidal*, which was nominated for an Independent Spirit Award, shortlisted for an Oscar and

earned Wickenden a Cinema Eye Honors nomination for Best Editing. At the 2016 Cinema Eye Honors, Wickenden and Albert Maysles shared the unique distinction of being the only two filmmakers nominated for their work on two different films. Wickenden's other nomination was for his work as co-director, producer and editor of the ITVS-funded feature *Almost There*.

NAITI GÁMEZ (Director of Photography) is a New York-based cinematographer and director whose work has included award-winning films and television series. Her short film, *Love, Sadie*, premiered at the Festival de Cannes Short Film Corner. Films she has shot have been shown at festivals worldwide, including Festival de Cannes, Sundance Film Festival, the Berlinale, Camerimage, Tribeca Film Festival, SXSW, Festival du Cinema de Paris and the Festival de Cine Internacional de Barcelona, among others.

Gámez's TV credits include work for HBO, Showtime, PBS, ESPN, MTV, Discovery Channel, Nova and Animal Planet. She has also worked for nonprofit organizations in the U.S. and abroad, and as a youth media educator. Gámez holds a B.A. in Latin American studies from Smith College, and an M.F.A. in film production with a cinematography concentration from the University of Texas at Austin.

CREDITS

Magnolia Pictures presents
A Hard Working Movies production

Directed by Penny Lane
Produced by Gabriel Sedgwick
Edited by Amy Foote and Aaron Wickenden, ACE
Director of Photography: Naiti Gámez
Original Music by Brian McOmber, feat. Angel Deradoorian and Jordan Dykstra
Executive Producer: Lori Cheatle
Associate Producer: Nickolas Hasse

Main Unit Sound Recordist: Taylor Roy
Main Unit Gaffer: Dave Steffey
Associate Producer: Nicolas Luna

Additional Camera: Kevin Belli, Jacob Bjelfvenstam, Jeff Dailey, Geoff George, Austin Hall,
Brian Henderson, Cole Howard, Derek Howard, Sevdije Kastrati, Brian Liu, Chris Mercury,
Gabriel Miller, Paul Mossine, Erynn Patrick, Prabhjot Randhawa, Patrick Rodgers, Ryan
Scafuro, Mike Shum, Matthew Staver, Richie Trimble

Additional Sound: Mike Guarino, Mark Haygen, Andy Hoare, Morgan Hobart, Erik Rasmussen,
Eric Reeves, Mark Roy

Additional Gaffers: Shawn Anderson, Nathan Shelton

Production Assistants: Elisa Haradon, Paul Jung, Anoaah Levine, Joseph Serfaty, Matthew
Smutek, Allana Williams, Tiago Zielske

Post-Production Coordinator: Nickolas Hasse

Assistant Editor: Hannah Choe, Jonathan Rapoport

Color and Finishing by: RCO
Supervising Colorist: Seth Ricart
Conform and Color Assistant: Natasha Wong
Color and Finishing Producer: Sheina Dao

Audio Post-Production provided by Gigantic Studios
Supervising Sound Designer and Re-recording Mixer: Tom Paul
Supervising Sound Editor: Jeremy S. Bloom

Assistant Sound Editor: Tzvi Sherman
Assistant Sound FX Editor: Nathan Hasz

Dialogue Editor: Esther Regelson
Foley Artist and Editor: Curtis Henderson
Foley Engineer: Raphael Ajuelos
Assistant Foley Engineer: Leo Rozenberg
Gigantic Studios Post-Production Coordinator - Madeline Lewis

Archival Researcher: Rosemary Rotondi

Baphomet statue artist: Mark Porter

Graphics: Kaleida Studio
Designer: Julie Gratz
Graphic Artists: Ivo Stoop, Julie Gratz

Music Supervisor: Kyle McKeveny

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