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***When God Sleeps* Premieres on *Independent Lens*  
Monday, April 2, 2018 on PBS**

**Online Streaming Begins April 3**

**A Love Story in the Age of Terror**



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(San Francisco, CA) — Directed by Till Schauder, *When God Sleeps* is a rap-punk-rock documentary about Iranian musician Shahin Najafi, who is forced into hiding after hardline clerics issue a fatwa for his death, incensed by a rap song that focuses on the oppression of women and human rights abuses. Shahin’s frantic escape leads to an impossible romance with Leili Bazargan, granddaughter of the first prime minister of the Islamic Republic of Iran, who was handpicked for the job by none other than the late Ayatollah Khomeini. Risking his life every time he steps on a stage, Shahin refuses to stop performing as an act of resistance while living a modern day Romeo and Juliet romance. *When God Sleeps* premieres on *Independent Lens* on Monday, April 2, 2018, 10:00-11:30 PM ET ([check local listings](#)) on PBS.

In 2012, Najafi released a satirical rap song that triggered thousands to rally in a campaign for his assassination. Incensed by the song’s irreverent remarks about Ali al-Naghi, one of twelve imams revered by Shia Muslims, hardline clerics placed a \$100,000 bounty on his head. “My songs didn’t make me famous,” said Shahin. “The fatwa did.”

German journalist Günter Wallraff, who gave refuge to Salman Rushdie after his death fatwa, offers shelter to Shahin too. Despite the threats against his life, Shahin insists on total freedom of expression. His stubborn refusal to back down in spite of death threats is reminiscent of a suicide mission, complicating long-term planning for his new romantic relationship. Ironically, his uncompromising stance is not unlike that of the religious hardliners who want him dead. Shahin sees it as his mission, indeed his life’s purpose, to stand up to oppressive religious leaders — even if he has to pay the ultimate price for it.

“Touching on hot topics like Islam, terrorism, protest, and the global refugee crisis, *When God Sleeps* checks off just about every newsworthy box as we immerse ourselves in the life of the “Salman Rushdie of Rap,”” said Lois Vossen, *Independent Lens* Executive Producer. “The human cost of resistance is at the core of this film, which explores nationalism and the growing hostility toward immigrants through the lens of a rebellious musician who occupies the complex role of both political activist and cultural bridge-builder.”



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Visit the [When God Sleeps](#) page on *Independent Lens*, which features more information about the film, which will be available for online viewing on the site beginning April 3, 2018.

### About the Filmmakers

**Till Schauder (Writer/Director/Producer)** got his start in Germany where he wrote and directed the award-winning narrative short *City Bomber* and his award-winning narrative feature debut *Strong Shit* (Max Ophüls Film Festival Reader's Award). His U.S. debut, *Santa Smokes*, won several international awards, among them Best Director at the Tokyo International Film Festival and the Studio Hamburg Newcomer Award. In 2012, Schauder completed his first documentary, *The Iran Job*, which made several 'best film of the year' lists in the U.S. and was shortlisted for a German Academy Award. In 2014 he was awarded the Gerd-Ruge-Stipendium by Medienstiftung NRW, Germany's largest federal film fund, for *When God Sleeps*, as well as grants from the Catapult Film Fund, The Sundance Institute, Fork Films and the Hartley Film Foundation. His script was recommended for a German Academy Award in the Films in Development category in 2015. Also in 2015 Schauder directed *The Young Man and the Sea*, a TV documentary for ZDF 3Sat, which was shortlisted for Germany's Grimme Award for Best Documentary Series. *When God Sleeps* has won several international awards including "Most valuable Documentary of the Year" from Cinema for Peace during Berlinale, and the "Golden Heynal Award" at the 57th Krakow Film Festival. It is currently shortlisted for a German Academy Award, and nominated for "best documentary" at festivals in Gothenburg, Oslo and Prague. In 2017, Schauder also completed *Warriors of Faith (Glaubenskrieger)*, for which he won the "ARD Top of the Docs" Award and a German Emmy for Best Documentary 2017. *Warriors Of Faith* was also nominated for the Prix Europa 2017. Schauder is currently completing *Reggae Boyz* for ARTE. He received his MFA at the University of Television and Film, Munich and teaches film at Vermont College of Fine Arts and NYU's School of Professional Development.

**Sara Nodjoui (Producer)** is an independent film producer, film festival programmer and consultant. Under their company banner, Partner Pictures, Nodjoui and Till Schauder most recently produced WHEN GOD SLEEPS, co-produced by ITVS, executive produced by Motto Pictures, Catapult Film Fund, and Fork Films, and supported by numerous foundations including the Sundance Institute, Jerome Foundation, and NYSCA. The film premiered in competition at the 2017 Tribeca Film Festival. It later went on to win the Golden Heynal award for Best Music Documentary at the Krakow Film Festival and the Most Valuable Documentary of the Year award for Cinema for Peace in Berlin. From 2004-2009, Nodjoui worked at the Tribeca Film Festival as an Associate Programmer. She is currently the Artistic Director of the New York Sephardic Film Festival. Nodjoui also produced the feature documentary THE IRAN JOB, which was released theatrically and on Netflix worldwide. In Germany, the film was shortlisted for a German Academy Award. For THE IRAN JOB, Nodjoui managed two of the most successful Kickstarter campaigns of all time. She regularly consults with filmmakers on crowd-funding and audience engagement campaigns. In 2016, Nodjoui was invited to attend the Sundance Creative Producer's Summit. In 2017 she was an IFP Cannes Producer's Network Fellow. Nodjoui and Schauder are currently working on the feature documentary REGGAE BOYZ, which is in post-production, and will air on ARTE in 2018.



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## CREDITS

Written and Directed by  
Produced by  
Executive Producers

Till Schauder  
Sara Nodjoumi and Till Schauder  
Lisa Kleiner Chanoff and Bonni Cohen  
Julie Goldman and Chris Clements  
Abigail Disney and Gini Reticker  
Sally Jo Fifer  
Till Schauder and Gerardo Milsztein  
Tina Grapenthin  
Mark Becker  
Noland Walker  
Michael Ehrenzweig  
Jutta Krug  
Max Avery Lichtenstein  
Shahin Najafi and Majid Kazemi

Photographed by  
Editor  
Consulting Editor  
Commissioning Editor for ITVS  
Supervising Producer for ITVS  
Commissioning Editor WDR  
Original Score by  
Songs by

### About *Independent Lens*

*Independent Lens* is an Emmy® Award-winning weekly series airing on PBS Monday nights at 10:00 PM. The acclaimed series, with Lois Vossen as executive producer, features documentaries united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement, and unflinching visions of independent filmmakers. Presented by ITVS, the series is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding from PBS, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Wyncote Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts. For more visit [pbs.org/independentlens](http://pbs.org/independentlens). Join the conversation: [facebook.com/independentlens](https://www.facebook.com/independentlens) and on Twitter [@IndependentLens](https://twitter.com/IndependentLens).

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