

MICHAEL GOI

Director & Cinematographer on 'American Horror Story' & 'Pretty Little Liars'

AC: What is your directing style like?

MG: *I make a shot list for the entire movie or episode during prep. The shot list is to remind me what the important story and character elements are. It helps me read the script if I break it down into shots. When I actually start shooting, I never look at the shot list. At that point, I don't have to. The important things are in my head.*

I work quickly. You never hear me say "That was great! Let's shoot another one." If it was great, why shoot another one? If I loved the performance on a take, I ask the crew if everyone was good on their end with the technical side.

I always have the scene edited in my head, so that when I film an angle, I know what part of the scene it will be used for. I feel that when you shoot every single angle in every shot size possible, the scene lacks the kind of design needed to be more than just a bunch of shots edited together.

AC: How much work are you doing on performances with actors?

MG: *When you work with the caliber of actors that I do, you need to say very little. When an actor says "I got it", I stop talking, because anything you say after that will only muddle the concept the actor has.*

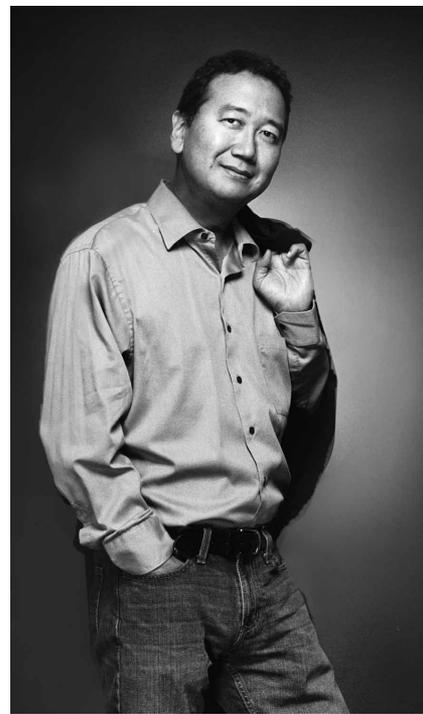
I always direct by standing right next to

the camera. That way I can immediately speak to them in a conversational level of voice when giving them direction.

Goi stepped away from cinematography on 'American Horror Story' at the end of season five. Since then, the show has made the switch from film to digital video.

MG: The cost difference between shooting on film or digital video has become smaller, and I think we're entering a period where cinematographers can once again choose which medium best suits the efficiency and artistry of the project. The kinds of looks I created on film for the first five seasons of AHS were a part of the visual lexicon of those seasons the same as Nelson Cragg's use of digital video in "Roanoke" (season six) was integral to the style of that season.

AC: Can you explain some of the differences creatively between Episodic directing and directing a standalone film?



MG: When you direct an episode of an existing show, the visual style and characterizations are relatively set. You still have some room to expand on the look and play with the characters as long as it doesn't start to seem like a different show. When I directed the "Pretty Little Liars" season 7 episode "Hit And Run, Run, Run", I asked for a couple of wider lenses than the show normally carried. Larry Reibman, the cinematographer, was very open to trying new things, and we did some very dynamic compositions which increased the tension between characters because you could see more of them in the same frame at the same time.

On a feature film, the director has more say about the creative aspects of the

project, both visually and dramatically.

AHS was very different because we encouraged directors to constantly come up with things that the show had never done before.

AC: Looking back over the many seasons of AHS, when would you say there was the biggest visual/aesthetic shift?

MG: Every season, things have changed in major ways. "Murder House" had a very stately, moody elegance, "Asylum" had a whacked-out, nightmarish, monochromatic feel, "Coven" had a glowing air of magic and mystery, "Freak Show" had an antique look of decay and decadence, "Hotel" had a noir-ish,

suffocating, insular atmosphere, and "Roanoke" had the air of reality television. We tried to make a different show every season using the same cast. I think it's one of the most innovative programs on television.

Michael Goi is now focusing on his upcoming directorial project 'MARY' with the legendary actor Gary Oldman.

Photo Credit:
Kodak/Douglas Kirkland
Interview with Adam Crookes