



## An Interview with Susan Lim



*Fantasy of Companionship Between Human and Inanimate* is a multi-award winning short film with a unique blend of animation, music and storytelling

by **Ed Blackadder**

Susan Lim is a surgeon, an educator, a composer, and now, an award-winning filmmaking. Lim's recent short film *Fantasy of Companionship Between Human and Inanimate* blends a unique style of storytelling through music and animation. She spent some time with INFLUX to tell us more about this project, its inception, and how all of the pieces came together.

**INFLUX:** *This is a very unique story, can you tell us about how the idea initially came about?*



**Lim:** In 2004, I embarked on surgical training with a robot named Zeus, in Santa Barbara. The objective was a partnership of man and machine which would perform surgical tasks better than either could do alone. I continued on my career path in robotics, and following the demise of Zeus, I partnered [with] Da Vinci, a state-of-the-art, till today, surgical robot, to perform complex surgeries.

I spent many hours alone with the robot, and we formed a working relationship. The pivotal event was in Hyderabad, India, where I was invited to give a talk in a session *Giant leaps; thrilling potential of AI and Robotics* before an audience of some 2000 delegates at an INK conference.

I decided to partner a hologram of a plush Inanimate toy ALAN, and speak on the 'Future of Companionship'. I was encouraged by the audience response which was overwhelmingly enthusiastic and positive, and from that moment, I decided to delve into storytelling about a partnership, a companionship between human and inanimate, life and non-life.



**INFLUX:** *What came first? The music? The animation? The story? Something else? Can you tell us about how each aspect came into being?*

**Lim:** Great question! When I embarked on the storytelling, I wanted to do it through writing lyrics for songs, I'm not a musician, so I invited my colleagues to come on board to form the ALAN team, and to compose music to my lyrics. Then we strung together the songs, orchestrated and created a 32-minute orchestral piece, the *Lim Fantasy of Companionship for Piano and Orchestra*, which was then recorded at Abbey Road Studios in Nov 2019, released on Signum Records in April 2021, and had its world premiere at the Esplanade Concert Hall in Singapore in June 2022. This music is the soundtrack to an animated short film, *Fantasy of Companionship Between Human and Inanimate*.

**INFLUX:** *This is a project with a lot of different people involved. What roles were most important in bringing this to fruition?*

**Lim:** After I wrote the lyrics together with Christina Teenz Tan, co-creator, (also my daughter), we brought on board four composers – Joi Barua from Mumbai, India for the more profound, soulful songs; Matthieu Eymard from France, for the more classic, romantic songs; Ron Danziger from Melbourne Australia for the more creative, playful songs; and Manu Martin, for the orchestral music. Together we became the ALAN team.



**INFLUX:** *What was the process of getting this projected animated?*

**Lim:** After I partnered with the hologram in the Hyderabad lecture, I was so impressed by the skills and talent of Samudra Kajal Salkia, an art historian, poet and animation artist, I invited him to come on board to create animations for the plush inanimate ALAN. He and his team are responsible for the all the ALAN animated shorts we have created to date.

**INFLUX:** *How did you go about composing and recording the music?*

**Lim:** We start with the storytelling through lyrics written by Christina and myself, then compose the music by Joi, Matthieu, Ron, and Manu, then with Matt as Music director together with Manu Martin, the music is arranged, and finally we all gather together as the ALAN team to record at Abbey Rd Studios!

**INFLUX:** *You have been receiving many awards for this. Why do you think the project has been received so well?*

**Lim:** The music and animation are both created with passion, and the team has a lot of fun with ALAN, it is almost a calling for us! We gather together regularly, and bond over our music which then inspires the animation. I guess it is a combination of the passion, love, spontaneity, creativity and fun, that comes through the project.

**INFLUX:** *What are your upcoming plans for Fantasy of Companionship between Human and Inanimate?*

**Lim:** So far, we have only released our 15-minute *Fantasy of Companionship between Human and Inanimate*, which is the project featured in this interview, but we are close to completing a full length Animated Fantasy feature film and we will be very excited to premiere this in film festivals soon. Downstream, we look forward to a cine concert with a live orchestra performing to the animation. We can't wait!!!

**INFLUX:** *You have an incredibly unique background as a surgeon, scientist, playwright, and lyricist. How did this combination of experiences bring this to life?*

**Lim:** As an academic surgeon, I have written many research publications and completed a doctoral thesis in Transplantation immunology. Writing is my passion. After surgery, and without the strict factual boundaries of writing medical articles, I was free to let my imagination drive my stories, and I embarked on developing the theme of ALAN, and delving deeper, the subject of life and non-life, and the role of the new disruptive technologies in creating a new breed of embodied AI systems, as companions in an increasingly lonely world.



**INFLUX:** *You are also the co-creator of Lim Fantasy of Companionship for Piano and Orchestra. What is that exactly and how does the film tie in to this project?*

**Lim:** The music, a 32 min Orchestral piece, is the soundtrack of the *Fantasy of Companionship between Human and Inanimate*. It tells, through 6 musical ACTS, the story for ALAN, the journey of a soul from wild to captive, animate to inanimate. Then trapped in its cotton body suit, it becomes a companion to a child. Facing its own mortality, it embraces synthetic biology, before teleporting, its soul to become quantum entangled with that of its human partner for eternity.

**INFLUX:** *What can we expect to see/hear/experience next from you?*

**Lim:** We are excited to share that the orchestral soundtrack, *Lim Fantasy of Companionship for Piano and Orchestra* will have its UK premiere at the Cadogan Hall, London this 5th July 2023, presented by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. Please, everyone, do join us for this happy occasion, an evening of Rhapsody, Romance and Fantasy, if in London in the summer. You may grab a ticket from the Cadogan Hall website.



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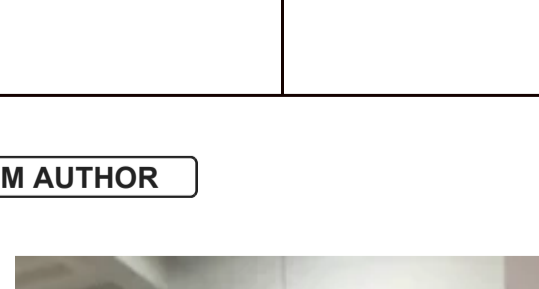
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