



RollingStone



EXCLUSIVE

Danny Elfman Settled a Sexual-Harassment Allegation for \$830,000

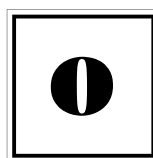
**RollingStone**

raise

BY ETHAN MILLMAN

Photo illustration by Matthew Cooley

JUL 19, 2023 8:17 PM



ON JULY 31, 2018, Danny Elfman, one of the most prolific and celebrated film and television composers of all time, entered into a settlement and nondisclosure agreement with a former friend and fellow composer. The agreement — previously unreported — came after she'd accused him of multiple instances of sexual harassment.

Now, the woman is suing Elfman, according to new court documents obtained by *Rolling Stone*, alleging that Elfman has failed to fully pay the agreed-upon \$830,000 when they both signed the settlement agreement five years ago.

The filing itself, a breach of contract suit filed in Los Angeles Superior Court on Wednesday, states only that Elfman and Nomi Abadi — a 35-year-old musician and composer who met the 70-year-old in 2015 — “agreed to resolve an underlying dispute which included terms that [Elfman] would make payments in four different categories in various installments over the course of 5 years totaling \$830,000.00.” Elfman failed to pay two \$42,500 installments in July 2019 and 2021, the suit claims.



Abadi is seeking injunctive relief, demanding the full \$85,000 she alleged Elfman hasn't paid. While the filing does not include details about the dispute that resulted in the payment, *Rolling Stone* can confirm based on multiple sources and documents that the dispute refers to claims of sexual misconduct.

As detailed in a November 2017 police report, obtained by *Rolling Stone* and taken a year after the alleged behavior, Abadi — a former child prodigy who'd played in orchestras since age five and won the attention of music institutions such as Julliard at eight — went to the LAPD with allegations against Elfman that the report categorized as “indecent exposure.” (When asked for comment, a rep for the LAPD said the department was unable to locate the report, and that the department has “no information to provide and no statement.”)



masturbated multiple times in front of her without her consent.

EDITOR'S PICKS

- ▶ **Special Report: Future of Music 2023**

- ▶ **The 200 Greatest Singers of All Time**

- ▶ **The 500 Greatest Songs of All Time**

- ▶ **The 100 Greatest TV Shows of All Time**

When asked for comment, Elfman provided a starkly different account of the nature of his and Abadi's relationship. In a lengthy response to *Rolling Stone's* inquiries, Elfman, through an attorney, denied all of Abadi's allegations, including claims that he'd ever exposed himself to Abadi or masturbated in front of her. Elfman painted their relationship as platonic, claiming that Abadi had attempted to pursue Elfman romantically and retaliated against him after he spurned her advances.

"How do I respond to accusations so serious that being innocent is not a valid defense? It is excruciating to consider that a 50-year career may be destroyed in one news cycle as a result of vicious and wholly false allegations about sexual misconduct," Elfman says in a statement to *Rolling Stone*. "Ms. Abadi's allegations are simply not true. I allowed someone to get close to me without knowing that I was her 'childhood crush' and that her



RollingStone

would pay for having rejected her. I allowed an ill-advised friendship to have far-reaching consequences, and that error in judgment is entirely my fault. I have done nothing indecent or wrong, and my lawyers stand ready to prove with voluminous evidence that these accusations are false. This is the last I will say on this subject.”

ADVERTISEMENT

Subsequent to the initial statement, a representative for Elfman claimed that Elfman and Abadi’s “limited interactions, which did not involve sexual contact, were fully consensual.” The representative also claimed that the initial settlement was a reaction to the [#MeToo](#) movement.



- ▶ **Elton John, David Furnish Testify in Kevin Spacey's Sexual Assault Trial**

 - ▶ **Kevin Spacey Calls Crotch Grabbing Claim 'Absolute Bollocks'**

 - ▶ **Trump Cheered His Killing As 'Retribution,' Now His Family Is Suing in Court**
-

“When faced with threats from the other party to go public with untruths at the height of the #MeToo movement, [Elfman] faced the impossible choice between settling and continuing his career and earning a living for his family or deciding to fight what at the time was an unwinnable battle to tell the truth — Danny chose his family,” the representative says. “It is disappointing, but sadly not surprising, that this baseless narrative would be revived now that the payments have stopped. Accusations alone should not and do not equate to guilt, and Danny will defend himself and clear his name with the volume of evidence and the other party’s own words — her words speak for themselves.”

Through her lawyer, Abadi declined to comment for this article. In a statement, Abadi’s attorney Jeff Anderson said, “It is ironic that Mr. Elfman’s current statements are directly contrary to the position he maintained in the underlying dispute and to the evidentiary record.”

At a February press conference two days before this year’s Grammys, Abadi addressed the room as a survivor of sexual misconduct in the music



RollingStone

“break stigmas in the industry surrounding trauma and shame.” While she didn’t name Elfman in her speech, Abadi, a Recording Academy member, stated that she didn’t vote after she saw the list of Grammy nominees, which she said included abusers. (Elfman was nominated for a Grammy award this year.) Abadi also called for the end of nondisclosure agreements that prevent alleged victims of sexual misconduct from speaking out.

“I saw the names of [alleged] abusers who were nominated for Grammys this year, and I was unable to bring myself to vote,” Abadi said at the press conference. “I simply cannot fathom the idea of going along with an industry that allows silence-breakers to be vilified, or participating in a voting process that lauds abusers while some of us are barred from career opportunities because we spoke out.

ADVERTISEMENT



they were abused and silenced,” she added.



“I simply cannot fathom the idea of going along with an industry that allows silence-breakers to be vilified”

nomi abadi

The complaint asserts that the allegedly missing payments were tied not to Abadi’s personal payments, but to cash for an unspecified charitable foundation established with some of the settlement money. Multiple friends of Abadi’s who’d spoken to her before the settlement recall to *Rolling Stone* that Abadi was insistent on starting a foundation to help survivors of sexual misconduct.

“While we can’t comment on a lawsuit that we haven’t received, the fact that it has made its way to the media before the defendant further shows that this is another stunt in a years-long campaign to demand money from Mr. Elfman and his family,” a spokesperson for Elfman says following the filing of the lawsuit. “The allegations are baseless.”

When Abadi and Elfman settled, she stipulated that alongside personal payments, some funds were to be earmarked for establishing a charitable entity to help female composers. By 2020, she’d founded the FCSL; It



Alison Plante, the FCSL’s vice president and a professor at the Berklee College of Music, declined to comment on specific allegations against Elfman and the company’s funding, but says the organization gives women in the composing industry a previously unavailable place to discuss their concerns.

“Any area where you have a power dynamic invites abuse. And there’s this real power differential between established composers and emerging [ones],” Plante says. “We’re never going to stop everybody from doing every wrong thing, but at least it wouldn’t be a systemic issue and I wouldn’t have to worry about sending my young alumni into the wilds of Hollywood and fear for their safety.”

ABADI FIRST MET ELFMAN in Denver in 2015. The day after they met, according to the police report, “Elfman asked an acquaintance for Abadi’s email address and the two began communicating about music.” Abadi — who grew up idolizing Elfman and his music — was excited, multiple friends of hers recall, hoping he’d take her on as a mentee and be a launchpad for her career. Abadi visited Elfman at his recording studio several times over the year, where Abadi’s misconduct claims were alleged to have taken place.

“We both loved Danny Elfman; I can’t stress enough how obsessed we were as young kids,” Abadi’s childhood friend Lisa Potter says. Potter recalls the excitement they both had when Abadi first met Elfman, who seemed at the time an ideal professional connection.



RollingStone

New Wave band Oingo Boingo before transitioning to film scores. By 1985, Tim Burton gave Elfman his major composing debut when he had Elfman write the score to *Pee-Wee's Big Adventure*. Since then, he's scored nearly 100 films — many of them blockbusters — making him one of the most commercially successful composers in the industry. Employing unusual, gothic undertones, Elfman, who is practically synonymous with whimsical horror, developed one of the most distinctive musical styles in film. He defined the sound of Burton's filmography, scoring nearly all of the director's movies since 1985, including *Batman*, *Beetlejuice*, *Edward Scissorhands*, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, and *Mars Attacks!*. For Burton's *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, Elfman performed the vocals as Jack Skellington, alongside composing the music.

ADVERTISEMENT



his theme for *The Simpsons* remains one of the most recognizable of all time. He's been nominated for 14 Grammys — winning one — and has two Emmy Awards and four Academy Award nominations. Elfman remains perpetually in demand, performing beloved annual Halloween shows at the Hollywood Bowl and composing the theme to the hit Netflix show *Wednesday*.

Potter and Olimpia — another childhood friend who Abadi confided in within a few weeks after the final instance of alleged misconduct and who asked that only her first name be used — recall that Abadi and Elfman's association started fairly typically. Their conversations focused primarily around music, and Abadi visited Elfman's studio and attended various parties he hosted, they say. "I remember being excited for her. They started off very casually getting to know one another in a professional sense, but also a light friendship, mostly chatting about the music industry and film scoring."



“Any area where you have a power dynamic invites abuse. And there's this real power differential between established composers and emerging [ones]”

alison plante, female composer safety league





RollingStone

that Elfman “would answer the door [at his recording studio] in a robe with no clothes underneath.” “Elfman explained this was how he liked to work and would always justify his behavior,” the report said. Elfman, according to the report, allegedly masturbated in front of her without consent three times that year. “This made Abadi very uncomfortable,” the report alleges, “but she would just look away because Elfman insisted it help[ed] with his creativity.”

“She looked at him as a mentor,” Olympia says. “She didn’t know [his behavior] at the time was absolutely crossing a barrier.”

ADVERTISEMENT



Discover what drives us

Sponsored By **REGENERON**

Discover, develop, deliver, repeat.
We're pushing the bounds of
science to make life-changing...

[LEARN MORE](#)

Olimpia and Erin Collins — a music-industry executive and friend of Abadi’s — recall being told that Elfman had a sauna at his facilities and would invite Abadi to join him. (A third anonymous source familiar with the matter also recalls being told of the sauna.) Collins remembers Abadi telling her that Elfman framed nudity as an important aspect of his creative process. Collins



that it wasn't sexual. Both Olympia and Potter similarly recall the description. (Elfman's spokesperson denied the allegation, writing, "Mr. Elfman did not invite Ms. Abadi to his studio to take a sauna with him and he never asked her to join him.")

"[Abadi] talked about him taking her under his wing. He said he wanted to show her his authentic self; apparently, that involved being naked a lot. He'd expose himself to her a lot, and eventually started masturbating in front of her," Collins says Abadi told her. Collins views the power dynamic between the two of them as a significant contributor to her continuing communications with Elfman: "Why do you go back? He's a powerful figure. He invited her to his studio; that's a great compliment for any composer. He's powerful; he called her special."

The report mentions another incident Abadi told the police in which Elfman allegedly masturbated in front of her in Paris after they'd flown out to France with several others to work on a project. (Abadi's confidants recall her going to Paris with Elfman and a group of others he invited.) Olympia, Potter, and Collins recall that Abadi went to France on Elfman's invitation, excited for the trip after having fostered a close relationship with him. During the trip, Elfman took nude photos of Abadi, they say, claiming that Abadi said she agreed to the shoot believing that it would be artistic.

Collins recalls Abadi claiming that Elfman masturbated in front of her during that photo shoot. While Olympia and Potter recall the photo shoot, they don't recall being told about him masturbating in Paris. Collins says



A rep for Elfman acknowledged the trip to Paris and the nude photos, but denied that he masturbated in front of Abadi and stated that the photos were Abadi's idea. "Mr. Elfman never masturbated in front of Ms. Abadi. Ms. Abadi has confirmed they never had sexual relations or that he touched her inappropriately," the rep says in a statement. "The photo shoot in Paris involved Ms. Abadi taking off her clothes and *her* request that he photograph her. Ms. Abadi was willfully and happily participating in the photo shoot that she initiated and requested. She disrobed almost immediately without any encouragement."

Anderson rebuked the rep's claim, asserting that Elfman instigated the shoot. "The attacks on Ms. Abadi today by Mr. Elfman and his representatives are as bizarre as his previous behavior towards Ms. Abadi," Anderson said. "He pressured Ms. Abadi to sit for an 'artistic' photo shoot to be included in his existing photo gallery of him with many other women. He has refused to this day to return those photos."



“She was very distraught, sleeping for hours each day and having panic attacks. It was like shell shock; she was really sad, panicked, and scared.”

lisa potter

The final instance of the alleged misconduct occurred in the summer of 2016, when Elfman, according to the police report, presented Abadi with a martini glass that Abadi claimed Elfman said was semen. Prior to the alleged incident, Elfman had sent Abadi an email with a photo of a full martini glass, reviewed by *Rolling Stone*, with the caption “a mystery pik [sic] to pique your ‘magination.”



provocative tagline that he meant as a joke.” The rep added that the glass was filled with the moisturizing cream Cetaphil. “It was designed to be a stupid photo prop and Ms. Abadi knew that,” the rep says. Elfman also supplied a declaration from an assistant claiming the contents were “made from stuff from his bathroom counter.”

Abadi also claimed to the LAPD that she had discussions about Elfman’s behavior with the assistant, who Abadi claimed told her that Elfman is a “different individual who does strange sexual things.” According to messages between Abadi and the assistant obtained by *Rolling Stone*, they told Abadi that Elfman had “labido [sic] interests...which i stay out of.” (The assistant did not reply to requests for comment.)

ELFMAN PROVIDED SEVERAL documents to *Rolling Stone*, including text messages, emails and legal declarations, that aimed to bolster his denials. Two legal declarations – one from a mutual friend who introduced Elfman and Abadi and another from a second former friend of Abadi’s – cast doubts on Abadi’s claims, stating that Abadi hadn’t told them of any allegations against Elfman until 2017, and that the allegations went against what they’d previously been told of their relationship.

The former friend supported Elfman’s assertion that it was a political argument on the night Elfman allegedly took out the martini glass – not any inappropriate behavior – that ended the friendship. “Abadi had told me that their friendship came to an abrupt end after a contentious political discussion after the Democratic primaries between Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton,” they wrote, also claiming that Abadi’s sexual harassment



sexual advances and exposed himself on multiple occasions. I did not believe her because Abadi and I had shared profoundly deep confidences about our lives ... and she never mentioned any of this.” The former friend claimed that Abadi’s “story was inconsistent with everything she had told me previously.”

The other friend who introduced Elfman and Abadi noted the political argument as well, and asserted Abadi’s claims didn’t line up with what Abadi had previously said about her relationship with Elfman. “Having known Nomi and Danny for years, and having heard Nomi’s complaints about Danny, I have every reason to believe that she is making false statements about sexual impropriety by Danny toward her because Danny has not given her sufficient attention following their falling out over politics,” they wrote.

Potter recalled a trip Abadi had taken to visit her in Utah in 2018, after the police report. She claims Abadi was under significant duress throughout the entire visit. “She was very distraught, sleeping for hours each day and having panic attacks,” Potter says. “It was like shell shock; she was really sad, panicked, and scared.”



In June 2018, Abadi and Elfman entered mediation hearings. A source who requested anonymity recalls attending an initial hearing, which didn't yield much progress between the parties. Abadi's friends say it was a difficult decision for her to take a settlement agreement and waive her ability to speak. Abadi took the agreement, the source says, feeling she had little choice given the difficulty of proving her claims.

"The whole thing with the NDA was a problem for her. She wasn't sure she wanted to give up her right to speak, but she realized this was a 'he said, she said' situation, and because there were no other witnesses, it wasn't easy," the source says. "I think Nomi feels responsible to other women."

"It came down to career choices and backlash," Collins adds. "She felt her career would be over if she said Elfman was a creep. And she's right. I'm sorry to say, but that's still unfortunately how this industry works." 