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Canadian Nets Not Upfront About Lack of Canadian Original Scripted Drama

Toronto – June 5, 2008 – Canadian broadcasters CanWest and CTV held their upfronts this week, allowing a sneak peek at what Canadians can look for on their TV screens come Fall. To the Writers Guild of Canada, the new season is best summed up in the title of CanWest's new show: "True Hollywood Story Canada" – the Canadian networks are filling their best time slots with U.S. programming, and offering very little new original scripted Canadian drama.

To the opening strains of "Baba O'Riley" (Teenage Wasteland), CTV's Ivan Fecan referred to his network as a "major originating force." But the lineup unfolded by President of Programming Suzanne Boyce reflected a schedule dominated by U.S. dramatic programming. They proudly touted that 75% of their prime time schedule is in simulcast with the American networks. With *Flashpoint* and *The Listener* the exceptions, the rule for new Canadian programming was copycat reality shows like *Canada's Next Top Model*.

The story was much the same later in the week at CanWest's upfront. They talked of building on a "strong foundation" with "new programming that is both diverse and distinctively Canadian." Yet their foundation of Canadian dramatic programming has been crumbling for years, and this year they are throwing a patch on it with just one new half-hour animated series (*Producing Parker*) and one mini-series (*The Last Templar*) written by Canadians. Included in the CanWest lineup of so-called "Canadian Original" programming are an international co-production with limited Canadian involvement and a *Punk'd*-style production starring long-time Los Angeles resident Howie Mandel. And, like CTV, CanWest too pastes the word 'Canada' into the American title and calls it Canadian, offering shows like *Project Runway Canada*.

"Even Bob and Doug Mackenzie come to us via American writers," says Maureen Parker, Executive Director, Writers Guild of Canada. "Calling programs like *The Hills After Show* and *True Hollywood Story Canada* original Canadian programming is confusing the mirror-image for the real thing."

Last year, broadcasters outside of Quebec spent almost half a billion dollars (\$461,770,968) on non-Canadian drama. These same broadcasters spent just over \$36.5 million on Canadian drama last year. Spending on Canadian drama by conventional broadcasters has dropped from 5.1% of advertising revenues in 1998 to just 2.3% of advertising revenues in 2007. And this figure would be even lower were it not for incremental benefits arising from CRTC approvals of media consolidation and new licences.

The WGC also learned, following the CTV celebration, that the broadcaster has killed the award-winning and critically-acclaimed series *Robson Arms*. The loss of this showcase for Canadian talent is a major blow to Canadian programming, and is further evidence of broadcasters' minimal commitment to original scripted drama – the true identity pieces of Canadian television. Just tacking on the word 'Canada' doesn't make it Canadian, and Canadians will not be fooled.

For more information, please contact David Kinahan, Writers Guild of Canada, at 416-979-7907 or 1-800-567- 9974, or by email at d.kinahan@wgc.ca

The Writers Guild of Canada (WGC) represents more than 1,800 professional English-language screenwriters across Canada. These are the talented people who create the distinctly Canadian entertainment we enjoy on our televisions, movie screens, radios and computers.