

CANADIAN

CANADA \$7 SPRING 2015 VOL.17, NO.2

SCREENWRITER

FILM | TELEVISION | RADIO | DIGITAL MEDIA

Tracey Deer:
Writing for a
Wide Audience
begins with
*"Sex and the
City on the rez"*

Laurie Finstad-
Knizhnik's Empire
isn't Strange but
it's eye-opening

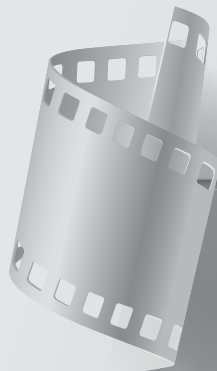


Making History

Lawrence Hill and Clement Virgo Put
Book of Negroes on Screen

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CANADIAN SCREENWRITER

The Journal of the Writers Guild of Canada

Vol. 17 No. 2 Spring 2015

ISSN 1481-6253

Publication Mail Agreement Number
400-11669

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Design Studio Ours

Printing Ironstone Media

Cover Photo: Christina Gopic

**Canadian Screenwriter is
published three times a year by
the Writers Guild of Canada (WGC).**

366 Adelaide Street West, Suite 401

Toronto, Ontario M5V 1R9

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WEBSITE: www.wgc.ca

Subscriptions: WGC members receive a
subscription as part of their membership.

Non-member subscriptions: \$20 for
three issues.

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Letters to the editor are subject to editing
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Contents

Features

Lawrence Hill and Clement Virgo: Making History 8

Lawrence Hill and Clement Virgo took Hill's
award-winning novel, *The Book of Negroes*, and spun it into
a mini-series that captured the viewers. Canadian history
makes for captivating television when everyone is on
the same page with the writers.

By Matthew Hays

Laurie Finstad-Knizhnik Rules her *Strange Empire* 14

Laurie Finstad-Knizhnik has taken the western and
turned it on its head in her *Strange Empire*, where the focus
is on strong female characters.

By Diane Wild

Mohawk Girls: A Deer in the Spotlight 18

Tracey Deer is breaking stereotypes with her APTN series.
Deer had an idea that may have sounded too narrow to appeal
to a wider television audience, yet that was exactly what the
broadcaster hoped to gain with her *Mohawk Girls*.

By Katherine Brodsky

Tribute to James Golick 7

WGC President Jill Golick pays tribute
to her son James Golick.

By Jill Golick

W-Files

Mike Kiss — By Cameron Archer 21

Sandra Chwialkowska — By Mark Dillon 23

Columns

From the Editor/Contributors 2
Inside/Out — From the President 3
“Oh Great Scribe...” — Advice for
the Scriptlorn 28

News

Beat Sheet 4

Spotlight 24

New Members 26



Focus: It's not just for pictures!

Distillation is the process of getting what you want by shedding what you don't, through heat.

Tracey Deer had an idea for a series about aboriginal women. Aboriginal People's Television Network liked the pitch Deer and writing partner Cynthia Knight offered: *Sex and the City* on the rez.

In reality *Mohawk Girls* is more complicated than that, but that pitch gets you to the neighbourhood at the corner of humour and drama and once there, well, you know, you can look around.

Perhaps it's not surprising that a show on a network that tells you right up front who it represents would be fairly narrowly focused.

But Deer and Knight know their stuff and have managed to create something that resonates on and off the reserve, and with First Nations and others.

And they did it through distillation. They didn't try to broaden their audience by diluting it — adding unnecessary “ingredients” to try to attract more viewers. This rarely works and the end product is often offensive in its vagueness.

Writing sharper, distilling, can result in the tastiest television. But it requires the “heat” of support and investment. *Mohawk Girls* seems to have that backing and support. And that is paying off for everyone.

It's encouraging to see a show that some might write off as aimed at a narrow audience attracting the attention of a broader viewership. Hopefully, it will make the decision-makers in our industry see that tightening the focus doesn't necessarily narrow the appeal.

Look at what's in this issue and you'll have an idea of just how sharp and distilled the writing on Canadian television has become. *Strange Empire* — how did anyone get approval for a western where the men are the second fiddles?

Then there's our cover story on *Book of Negroes* — to do that epic and do it right is encouraging from an industry that often sticks with the safe and reliable.

And those are just a few examples of how focusing on the story you need to tell can resonate with a larger audience. Our screenwriters are getting the stills cookin' at just the right temperature. By focusing or distilling and not diluting, we'll have better stories and stronger, sharper television.

Hopefully it won't be long before we hear someone say in their pitch: *Mohawk Girls* on *Campus* or *Mohawk Girls* meet *Get Smart* or *Mohawk Girls* in *Borealis*. Man, that would be awesome. ■

— Tom Villemaire

Spring 2015

Cameron Archer runs the Canadian television/media website Gloryosky (www.sweetposer.com), and is also a freelance arts writer. He currently lives in Eastern Ontario.

A freelance arts and entertainment writer, **Katherine Brodsky** has written for *Variety*, *Entertainment Weekly*, *USA Weekend*, *Mashable*, *Elle Canada*, *MovieMaker Magazine*, *The Independent*, *Stage Directions*, and many others. She has interviewed a diverse range of intriguing personalities, including Oscar, Emmy, Grammy, Tony, and Pulitzer winners. In her spare time she wears sunglasses at night and runs her own cult, Katherineology. Follow her on Twitter @mysteriouskat

Mark Dillon is a Toronto-based freelance journalist and former editor of *Playback* magazine. He is author of the award-winning *Fifty Sides of The Beach Boys*.

Christina Gapic is a Toronto-based freelance photographer specializing in portrait, event and documentary photography.

Matthew Hays is a Montreal-based writer, author, and university and college instructor. His articles have appeared in *The Globe and Mail*, *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *Vice*, *Maclean's*, *The Walrus*,

Cineaste, *POV*, and *The Toronto Star*. He teaches courses in film studies at Marianopolis College and Concordia University. His book, *The View from Here: Conversations with Gay and Lesbian Filmmakers* (Arsenal Pulp), won a 2008 Lambda Literary Award and he received the Concordia President's Award for Teaching Excellence for 2013-14.

Diane Wild is a Vancouver-based writer and editor who runs the TV, eh? website (www.tv-eh.com) about Canadian television.

Andrew Wreggitt is an award-winning film and television screenwriter. Among his 16 movies or mini-series are *Corner Gas: The Movie*, *The Phantoms* for CBC television, which won an International Emmy Award and the WGC Award, and *Borealis*, a multiple CSA award winner including best movie and best writing. In all Andrew has won three Gemini/CSA awards for writing and has been nominated five other times. Andrew is also a multiple WGC award winner and a six time AMPA award winner for best screenplay. He has written for TV series such as *Flashpoint*, *Heartland*, and *North of 60*. Andrew is also a playwright and poet and lives just outside of Calgary Alberta.



When Bad Things Happen to Good People

Bad things happen to good people. Sometimes it's deliberate — as it was recently in Paris at the French satirical newspaper, *Charlie Hebdo* — and sometimes it's random chance, as it was for our WGC President's son James Golick who died in a car accident in Mexico in December. In either case, there is the terrible emptiness of personal loss and the sadness at the lost talent, intelligence, warmth and humanity of the individuals. But there is something else.

We saw it on the streets of Paris when hundreds of thousands linked arms and walked through the streets of their city, not just in defiance of what had been done to them, but also in a spirit of community at their shared loss. They shared their grief with each other, and the rest of the world, and it gave us all strength. Ignorance and brutal violence cannot extinguish ideas. The pencils being held in the air were a declaration of shared values — freedom of expression in the face of violent intimidation. A statement of community.

Last December, writers and industry friends from all across the country were with Jill Golick and her family as they struggled with their own tragic loss.

The Writers Guild of Canada has been a big part of Jill's life for many years — as a councillor and now as president. She's given a lot of her time and energy to this organization and I think she would tell you that she's done it not just because the writers represented here are connected by our business interest, but because we are a community. A community that looks out for each other, that celebrates our achievements together, fights for our common good and embraces each other's pain sometimes too.

This is a good time for WGC writers to remember that this kind of community exists because people like Jill have given their time and effort — that every one of us has a role to play in keeping this a strong, unified, active membership. There are times when you need to step out of that little office in your head, take someone's arm and walk down the street together — do something for your colleagues for our common good. Take action. Declare your values. Hold a pencil in the air. Be part of a community.

I don't mean this in a theoretical way. I mean pick up a phone and call the WGC office and say "how can I help?" Or when a WGC staff member calls you looking for help — find a way to say yes even though you are busy. The ask will be small, the time you give will be small but, what you get in return is big. We all need to be part of a community — in good times and bad. ■

— **Andrew Wreggitt**

Writer-to-Writer



The WGC's Writer-to-Writer welcome program for new members, launched in the fall of 2013, continues to grow. The program was created to provide new members with important information about the guild, and to give them access to experienced writers for insight into both craft and the industry. The guild would like to thank the following members who have volunteered their valuable time through the Writer-to-Writer initiative.

Western Region: Dave Lawrence, Scott Morison

Pacific Region: Ken Craw, Susin Nielsen, Elizabeth Stewart, Sarah Dodd

Central Region: Adam Barken, Alex Levine, Bobby Theodore, Elan Mastai, James Hurst, Jessie Gabe, Kate Barris, Larry Bambrick, Matt MacLennan, Michael Grassi, Mike Kiss, Nicole Demerse, Noel Baker, Patrick Tarr, Sandra Chwialkowska, Will Pascoe

Quebec Region: Alex Epstein, Doug Taylor, Gerald Wexler, Lienne Sawatsky, Lisa Hunter

Atlantic Region: Deanne Foley, Chaz Thorne, Gia Milani

If you are a WGC member and would like to get involved, please contact Terry Mark: t.mark@wgc.ca.

Tassie Cameron, Margaret Collier Award Recipient

Tassie Cameron has been named as the recipient of this year's Margaret Collier Award, to be presented during Canadian Screen Week (Feb. 23-March 1, 2015). The Margaret Collier Award is given to a writer for "a body of work in Canadian film and/or television, or for significant contribution to the international profile of Canadian film and/or television."

Tassie has written a wide range of television (from *Flashpoint* to *Degrassi: The Next Generation*) and is currently showrunner of the hit series, *Rookie Blue*, aired on Global in Canada, and ABC in the United States.

Awaiting Outcomes of the CRTC's "Let's Talk TV"

The gears appear to still be turning at the CRTC, as the regulator considers outcomes of the "Let's

Talk TV" policy hearing, which wound up its public phase in September. The WGC spoke to writers' concerns at the hearing on issues including the following:

- The need for a healthy industry as the foundation for the production of quality Canadian programming
- Mandated unbundling of cable channels, which could present consumers with fewer choices for the same monthly bill
- Eliminating simultaneous substitution, which is how Canadian broadcasters protect their exclusivity — and associated revenues — on much non-Canadian programming
- Regulating over-the-top broadcasters

The Commission released a minor decision related to "Let's Talk TV" in November, when it announced that cable and satellite providers could no longer require 30-day cancellation notices. At press time, however, no decisions on the remainder of the issues have been made. Our sources tell us that the CRTC will likely announce the major outcomes in March or April.

WGC Members Pitch in with Bell Media Diverse Screenwriters

WGC screenwriters' generosity in nurturing the next generation of writers cannot pass unremarked upon. As the Bell Media Diverse Screenwriters program heads into its final year, some of the guild's leading writers made time during a busy week at the Canadian Screen Awards in Toronto to make sure they could also get to Vancouver to lead workshop sessions with the program's latest group of participants.

WGC guest speakers include: David Barlow, Mark Farrell, Penny Gummerson, Jennica Harper, Dennis Heaton, Jason Leaver, Susin

Nielsen, Ron E. Scott, Bruce Smith, and Damon Vignale. Industry insiders include Bell Media's Michele McMahon, Carol Commisso from Rogers, Shaw's Stephen Finney, local producer Rob Bromley from Force Four, and Lucas Talent agent, Anna Archer. The workshop also features alumni from the program, including Tricia Collins, Gorman Lee, Todd Ireland (who writes for *Continuum*), and Tami Gabay, the program's most recent intern on *Motive*.

The program's final workshop for eastern Canadian participants will be held at the end of April in Toronto.

Writers Talking TV

Writers continue to talk TV with other writers (and fans, and industry members) at the guild's Writers Talking TV (WTTV) events. In November, WTTV featured Laurie Finstad-Knizhnik's female-focussed western, *Strange Empire*. On that occasion, WTTV was part of the Canadian International Television Festival, and as well as Laurie's in-depth interview by fellow writer Denis McGrath before a live audience at TIFF Bell Lightbox, Laurie was also interviewed on the festival's red carpet. You can view the "red carpet" interview at the WGC's YouTube channel. (www.youtube.com/user/Writersguildofcanada) and hear the WTTV podcast at the WGC website or on iTunes.

To kick off 2015, WGC councillor Anne-Marie Perrotta ran an edition of WTTV in Montreal, featuring *Mohawk Girls* showrunner, Cynthia Knight. The conversation about the show, sometimes billed as "*Sex and the City* on the rez," was moderated by Leila Basen. In early February, WTTV came back to Toronto for a sneak peek at Mark Ellis and Stephanie Morgenstern's *X Company*. This WTTV event took



In early February Writers Talking TV was back in Toronto with Mark Ellis and Stephanie Morgenstern's *X Company*, two weeks before it appeared on CBC.

place two weeks before the show premiered on CBC TV.

Stay tuned for WTTV events (writers TBA) on March 12 and June 30. You can listen to all episodes of WTTV as they are posted on the WGC website. The podcasts provide an excellent opportunity to hear what WGC screenwriters have to say about the art and craft of screenwriting.

WGC reaches Tentative Agreement with Canadian Producers

On Jan. 22, 2015 the WGC reached a tentative agreement with the Canadian Media Production Association (CMPA) and the Association Québécoise de la Production Média (AQPM) on a new Independent Production Agreement (IPA) for Canadian screenwriters.

Jill Golick, WGC president, said, "This proposed agreement makes forward-thinking changes that include expanding our jurisdiction and puts Canadian screenwriters in a better position in our evolving industry."

At press time the deal had yet to be ratified. Once ratified by WGC members, the CMPA board and the

general assembly of the AQPM, the new collective agreement will set the minimum terms of engagement until the end of 2017.

Nova Scotia Tax Credit and Writers

The Nova Scotia Department of Finance and Treasury Board is reviewing the province's regulatory and tax policies, including its film and television production tax credit. The Film Industry Tax Credit (FITC) is one of Nova Scotia's key production supports, so when the WGC heard just over a year ago, in an apparent change of practice, that writers' fees were not being included as an eligible cost in calculating the credit, there was cause for concern. As a result, the guild participated in Nova Scotia's tax and regulatory review, "Charting a Path for Growth," arguing that Nova Scotia was an outlier among other Canadian tax credits, which do include writers' fees. A report on the review was released in Nov., 2014, and we were pleased to see that it included a recommendation to align the FITC with the Ontario tax credit, including with respect to writers' fees. ■



MERIDIAN ARTISTS

Congratulations
to Our WGC
Members on
their Canadian
Screen Award
Nominations

JEFF BIEDERMAN

BEST COMEDY SERIES – SPUN OUT*

SARAH GLINSKI

**BEST CHILDREN'S OR YOUTH FICTION
PROGRAM OR SERIES – DEGRASSI***

MIKE KISS

**BEST WRITING IN AN ANIMATED PROGRAM OR
SERIES – GROJBAND "WISH UPON A JUG"**

AL MAGEE

**BEST LIFESTYLE OR TALK PROGRAM OR
SERIES – INCOME PROPERTY***

ma

*Shared Nomination



James Golick 1985-2014

Jill Golick, the WGC's president, whose tremendous contributions to the guild span over three decades, suffered an immeasurable loss in December with the death of her son, James Golick. James was a talented, passionate man whose life had, and continues to have, an impact on many. Jill wrote a beautiful tribute to her son, called *The Adventurous Life of James Golick*. With her permission we share the opening with you:

James was a rotten teenager. But like everything James did, he was spectacular at it. He was the most rotten rotten teenager that anyone could be. He took teenage rottenness to new heights. He crushed it.

And he climbed so far since then... to become one of the world's most spectacular human beings. You don't have to believe his mother. There are many who will back me up on this.

There were four constants in James' life. Four threads that were ever present in the amazing tapestry that was his life: *Music. Communication. Computers. People.*

To read the entire tribute, go to:

<https://medium.com/@jill380/the-adventurous-life-of-james-golick-bda4a33137b6>

To honour James Golick's memory, please contribute to the James Golick Grant for Women in Computology at: jamesgolick.bitmakerlabs.com ■

MAKING HISTORY

By Matthew Hays

Author Lawrence Hill and filmmaker Clement Virgo on their collaboration, the critically-acclaimed miniseries *The Book of Negroes*





Novelist Lawrence Hill acknowledges it's the kind of thing writers dream about. His critically-lauded, multiple award-winning 2007 novel, *The Book of Negroes*, was adapted into a six-part mini-series (budget: \$10 million) for the CBC and BET (the American network Black Entertainment Television). The cast included Oscar winners Cuba Gooding Jr. and Louis Gossett and was shot on two continents; the director is one of Canada's most experienced, Clement Virgo (*Rude*, *The Wire*). The series, which premiered in January, got solid reviews and ratings: 1.7 million viewers nationwide taking the top spot in its time slot.

And it's a Canadian project about Canadian history.

Virgo feels the show has attracted a lot of attention because it's a distinctly Canadian story but ties in to the larger, international issue of slavery. "It's a little-known story, a fascinating bit of history," he says. "The book really gets into historical places we haven't really been before."

And the story itself is just the type of thing critics have been urging Canadian broadcasters to strive for. It's a decidedly Canadian take on a broader social issue. The book and series title is taken from an actual manifest of African slaves who were guaranteed freedom from American slavery in Nova Scotia in return for pledging their allegiance to the king. For the most part, the slaves were freed when the British occupied New York City during the American Revolution. They were permitted to flee to Nova Scotia in return for their loyalty to the King. The story focuses on the plight of one slave, a fictional character Hill created, who is abducted in West Africa, sold into slavery in America, then promised freedom in Nova Scotia, but finding something quite different there before leaving for England.

After tripping over the title, Virgo, who was put off by the word 'Negroes,' was encouraged by personal friend and Canadian singer, Molly Johnson, to read the book. After starting, he couldn't put it down and immediately saw the possibility of a film version. After meeting with Hill approximately five years ago, Virgo began shopping the idea around, knowing such an epic project would require multiple sources of financial backing and international broadcast platforms.

Virgo says he realized something early on: *The Book of Negroes* was so complex it demanded something more than a feature-length film and was better suited to be adapted to mini-series length. He also knew he wanted Hill to be involved in the writing process even though he had no experience screenwriting. "Lawrence had done so much research," Virgo notes, "and I knew that would prove invaluable."

Virgo recalls asking some basic questions about how to transform the book into a screenplay: "What is the core of the story? What is the through line? For *The Book of Negroes*, it was clear to me: someone has been taken from her home and all she wants is to get back home. How can you distill that and be economical about it? In a novel, you have lots of time; in cinema or TV, you often don't."

While Hill describes the past five years working on *The Book of Negroes* as "an amazing experience," he says it presented a steep learning curve in terms of gear-switching from page to screen. "It was tough to figure out issues around economy. Clement would say that this 20-page section of the book, you have to limit that to one page, which he explained was about a minute in screen time. [It was about] figuring out how to telescope material down to its essential, to eliminate material, but also to realize that a look between two actors can encompass an entire paragraph or two on the page. Just the way people look at each other can

"In screenwriting, you have images and you can convey things in seconds. With a novel you have the internal life of the characters. With film and TV, you have to hear it or see it, that's all you have. And it all comes back to that word: economical."



The Book of Negroes premiered on CBC, January 7.

convey so much. It was hard for me to see things in that kind of economical way. What really needs to be shown here? That was the hardest thing to imagine: how to look at a chapter and figure out the best way to deliver that in a matter of minutes on the screen.”

“With a novel, you can spend five pages describing a feeling you had in the past,” explains Virgo. “In screenwriting, you have images and you can convey things in seconds. With a novel you have the internal life of the characters. With film and TV, you have to hear it or see it, that’s all you have. And it all comes back to that word: economical.”

Hill says his sagest words of advice to novelists who are about to take the leap into adapting for the screen is: Don’t be too married to your words. “The process posed no threat to my sanity, not because I’m particularly grounded, but because I felt respected throughout the process and because I used to be a journalist. I was a reporter for *The Winnipeg Free Press* and *The Globe and Mail* in my twenties, and every day my work was often completely reworked, whether it was on the front page or back and you just had to deal with it. You can’t survive emotionally in the newsroom if you’re going to freak

out every time your work is altered. So, I learned as a young journalist that there is no such thing as sacred writing — nothing’s sacrosanct and you won’t die if someone changes what you’ve done. The world will go on and you can’t afford to let it get to you. So, being at a daily newspaper and having to face that repeatedly turned out to be very good training for the adaptation experience many years later. It’s best not to take changes personally or to feel that your work is being challenged in a bad way.”

Hill says Virgo’s extensive experience made the adaptation process fascinating, though he adds it was always intense work. “Clement has an astounding notion of structure and how a story should play out on the screen. I was blown away by how quickly he could envisage how a scene would work, how the beats would happen. I’d be trying to figure out how it would work and we would have a conversation about it and it was clear he’d already worked it out, leaving me in the dust. He thinks like a director and I was thinking more like a writer, which is understandable. He could so viscerally see how the scenes would play out in his head. I was truly impressed with that.”



“Yes, there was a lot of material that had to go, but there was also a lot that had to be added to make things sing on the screen.”

Screenwriting, Hill learned, means “for the most part, you have to forget the inner voice. Yes, there are a few voiceovers, but one of the richest parts of many novels, including *The Book of Negroes*, is the interiority of thought: That we’re allowed to think deeply and see directly into how the character thinks and feels. [You] can’t do that quite so directly on television. The main thing is to move away from the interiority of thought and to try to find scenes and images and sounds and dialogue that allow us to divine what her feelings are and thoughts are, even though you don’t really hear them. That’s a huge shift because this is a very interior novel.”

For Virgo, the biggest challenge was avoiding an episodic feel despite it being a mini-series. “I didn’t want it to feel like we were just going from one scene to the next. The story had to feel connected. Maybe because I’ve directed a lot of episodics, I wanted there to be a sense of continuity and a lot of tension that’s maintained throughout the six episodes. In the novel, she goes from Africa to South Carolina to Nova Scotia to England — to fit all those parts in was really crucial.”

And that need for continuity and an emotional through line meant a major shift in the book’s narrative. “One of the things we changed was to create a love story that runs right throughout the series,” notes Virgo. “In the novel, her husband dies, never making it to Nova Scotia. For me it was important that he made it out of Africa to Nova Scotia. It was about an emotional continuity for the series. Keeping those pieces of the story together was very important to me.”

Hill says page-to-screen adaptation isn’t just about cutting — it’s about imagining new worlds and new scenes and ideas. “It’s not just about what you cut, not just about what can survive, but about what you can add. There are things you can add, like a moment that might seem slow in the novel, you can jazz the story up for the screen. Yes, there was a lot of material that had to go, but there was also a lot that had to be added to make things sing on the screen.

“I guess for me the one big revelation is that as much as there is to be taken out, new things needed to be added. There were a lot of new things to be imagined.” ■

A CRITIC'S PRESCRIPTION



Kate Taylor discusses her notorious 2012 *Globe and Mail* column about Canadian TV 'thinking big,' and what's changed (and what hasn't) since then.

While criticism of the CBC has become routine since last fall's epic Jian Ghomeshi scandal, it was three years ago that *Globe and Mail* arts columnist Kate Taylor took aim at both the Ceeb specifically and Canadian TV execs in general. In a thoughtful column, Taylor admonished Canadian TV producers and network execs for missing the rather gigantic boat that was the renaissance in the TV medium — something she noted was happening almost exclusively in the U.S. and U.K., but not here.

And not for lack of writing talent, she duly noted. She pointed out that Chris Haddock, who created *Da Vinci's Inquest*, *Da Vinci's City Hall* and *Intelligence*, was working as a writer but for *Boardwalk Empire*, the Martin Scorsese-created show produced by HBO. Taylor reported "Canadian TV writers, directors and producers say the thing that is most lacking here is the commitment to get behind individual creators and let them pursue their ideas the way Matthew Weiner did with *Mad Men* and Julian Fellowes did with *Downton Abbey*."

Reached at her *Globe* office, Taylor says she sees positive signs since penning that column, like *The Book of Negroes* and *Strange Empire* in particular. "The CBC does seem to be more conscious of needing to have more Canadian-identified writing and stories. *The Book of Negroes* is such a fascinating bit of untold history; if anything, that series was a no-brainer to green light. I think *Strange Empire* is a gutsier risk and a great feminist piece, but, unfortunately, it's not getting the ratings."

Taylor concedes the CBC is in a terrible catch-22: "We want the quality viewing and the chattering classes will complain when they see too much programming like *Battle of the Blades* or *Dragons' Den*. But many people watch those shows, they're popular. How can you ask a broadcaster that's supposed to be all things to all people ... to do a cable drama? Our audience is very fractious. The Canadian audience outside of Quebec is not a niche."

Taylor suggests two main things will have to happen to allow for more risks to be taken and for Canadian TV to get better. "It'd be nice if CTV and Global stepped up to the plate and did more programming. If they did the shows like *Battle of the Blades*, that would free up the CBC to take more interesting risks. In Australia, where the population is comparable, you have commercial channels that do the reality TV shows and the crowd-pleasers, and then that frees ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation] to do the historical dramas, documentaries and more serious programming," said Taylor.

"And the CBC then needs a bigger budget. People quote the CBC's budget as if it's a lot of money. In the grand scheme of things, it's not. We complain about the CBC but we don't want to pay for it. It's like someone complaining about not getting very good food at a restaurant when they're only willing to shell out \$12 for a meal."

And given the latest round of cuts, Taylor adds, "I can't say I'm much more optimistic. You get what you pay for. And you have to be willing to back up your writers and creative teams." ■

LAURIE FINSTAD-KNIZHNIK RULES HER *STRANGE EMPIRE*

By Diane Wild

In the beginning, there was a logline: The men go hunting and they don't come back to their women.

Laurie Finstad-Knizhnik had tucked a western in her bottom drawer when she was busy with *Durham County*, so she was primed when producers Jeff Sagansky and Timothy O. Johnson approached her with an idea for a female-centred western.

Musing on the ripple effects of that seminal event, Finstad-Knizhnik immersed herself in the history and the art of the time to build the story, characters and voice of the show. She'd landed on the time of 1869, just after Canadian confederation and a place, just north of the Montana Territory. But *Strange Empire* is no extended *Heritage Minute*.

"Canada has an extremely interesting history if we can get over the fact of the railway going through and three cheers for John A. Macdonald," said Finstad-Knizhnik, likening the history her show is steeped in to "a sex trafficking story."

Finstad-Knizhnik wasn't interested in the stock Western characters either, except to toy with them. Her central women include a Metis sheriff, a half-black madam and wife, and an Asperger's-like doctor, all women with a semblance of power in a nascent town built around mining and prostitution, under the unstable rule of a tormented madman.

She focused on the marginalized people, the Chinese, native and black populations who were often in conflict with or used by those arriving in the West to make their fortune: "The eccentrics, the crazy people. Remarkable people who threw themselves into the woods."

They speak in stylized, poetic dialogue she credits to her research that included reading journals

and books from that era. "There's a kind of language that lodges itself in your ear and the characters start to speak it."

She mentions inspirations such as John Ralston Saul's *A Fair Country* to help her access "who we are as Canadians from our history, understanding the spirit of the adventurer and non-European power hierarchies." She's also fascinated and inspired by the difference between Elmore Leonard, exploring story through action and dialogue, versus Cormac McCarthy in *Blood Meridian* — "one of my favourite books ever. Read one paragraph of description and it's right there in front of your face. It lifts and puts you in a wholly different place."

Like *Durham County*, *Strange Empire* is highly cinematic, using visual imagery to draw viewers into the strange world. "I'm tight with the DP on *Strange Empire*," she explains. "He and I were the continuity through the 13 episodes. We looked at a lot of early colour photography, glass-plate photography and newspaper photography to get a sense of how we wanted things to look. I like to be able to look at a picture and be able to see the narrative emerging from it."

She gives the answers you might expect about her television influences coming from shows such as *The Sopranos*, *The Wire*, and *Homicide*, but she also mentions Bergman and Fellini as well as surrealist art,



Laurie Finstad-Knizhnik in her office.

including Joseph Cornell's shadow boxes. "I feel that's what you're doing when you're writing a script — you're trying to make a picture."

It's not hard to see why Katrina Onstad, the novelist and now a CBC executive in charge of production, calls Finstad-Knizhnik "a walking library."

"I felt like my job was sitting back and letting her work through her own process to shape all of this into the novel it really is," says Onstad. "She's really the novelist. She has such a grand sense of scale and scope for what she's trying to do with this show, and we respect that and wanted to make a safe space for her to create this unique project."

Given the genre, complex serialization, violence and sexuality, *Strange Empire* was not the most obvious fit for the public broadcaster — unless you heard CBC management's declaration at last year's Banff World Media Festival that they were changing course into more premium cable waters.

Strange Empire was originally pitched in early 2012 to a CBC that was about to go through a regime change. "We went through a lot of execs," Finstad-Knizhnik says.

She credits its survival to the strength of the concept. "If the story works, then why not make it? If you're thinking things like 'TV landscape' and what network execs like, you're putting yourself on a wrong

path." She was confident, given their knowledge of *Durham County*, that CBC knew what they were signing up for all along.

"It was a perfect marriage," says Helen Asimakis, CBC's senior director, drama, commissioned and scripted programming. "The material was here and in development already and when we made the decision to go a little more cable we didn't have to shut it down or ask it to make a 180-degree turn."

All three are baffled by questions about whether the female focus was ever a point of discussion or concern. "The fact that it's female-focused is what sets it apart from every other show in the western genre, so it's not something we shied away from," says Onstad. Finstad-Knizhnik points to the plethora of female-led shows on television today, as well as the strong male characters in *Strange Empire*, including Aaron Poole's John Slotter and Tahmoh Penikett's Marshal Caleb Mercredi.

She says she wanted to explore gender and desire through these characters. Rebecca, the socially awkward doctor played by Melissa Farman, has a love interest who's revealed slowly — to the audience and to Rebecca — to be a woman dressed as a man.

"It was really normal back then if you wanted to be safe to put on men's clothes and support yourself that way," explains Finstad-Knizhnik. "If you needed



The female dominant cast of CBC's *Strange Empire*.

to work and make a decent wage that's what you did — you dressed as a man.”

“I wanted to talk about desire and not have it politicized. I didn't want to do the gay/straight/bi politically-correct kind of stuff, or the gratuitous kind of stuff — ‘oh look, girl on girl’. I wanted to feel my way through what other things gender might be.”

Asimakis refers to the “casual diversity” of the show as opening up themes around race even further. For example, she remembers Finstad-Knizhnik was eager to mine new possibilities with Isabelle Slotter when Tattiawna Jones was cast.

Finstad-Knizhnik says she uses writing as a process of discovery, meaning she isn't big on outlines. Nor is she interested in stand-alone stories.

“I'm more interested in the epic feel of the thing. Why is this story worth telling? It must have a weight if it's 13 hours, some sort of meaning. To write a stand-alone seems counterintuitive.”

She wrote the six-episode seasons of *Durham County* but had to adjust to a more collaborative approach for the less manageable 13 of *Strange Empire*.

“I have a great lieutenant in Jackie May. She totally and thoroughly sees what I'm seeing and carries that vision forward. And she writes fast, she writes well and she takes risks. I really admire writers who will do that. I love writers who take risks. I like to see people who can do something I can't do.”

Now that the world of *Strange Empire* has been thoroughly set up, and now that Finstad-Knizhnik has survived the huge workload of season one, a second season, if the show is granted one, would have more stand-alone elements, partly to preserve her sanity and be able to hand more off to other writers. However many seasons it gets, CBC feels it successfully signaled its new direction.

“I'm so proud of it,” says Onstad. “I can't believe my good fortune that I came here to CBC and that was the first show I worked on. I think it will have a place in Canadian television history forever. There's never been another show like it, with that strong female perspective, with a cast that's so diverse serving the story, that's so beautifully written and poetic. I watch it and I'm so in awe of this thing that they made.” ■



2014: Peter Mitchell



2013: Stephanie Morgenstern & Mark Ellis



2012: Mark McKinney



2011: Tassie Cameron



2010: Heather Conkie



2009: Mark Farrell



2008: Peter Mohan



2007: Brad Wright

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A DEER IN THE SPOTLIGHT

By Katherine Brodsky

Mohawk Girls, APTN's critically-acclaimed series about four young Mohawk women trying to navigate life and love, was a long journey for Tracey Deer.

She came up with the idea for the show nearly a decade ago, as a 26-year-old documentary filmmaker. A Mohawk girl herself, at the time she was going through the same experiences that the characters on the show were – as were her cousins, friends and sister. In fact, Deer was witness to so much chaos going on around her that one day it led to a dangerous thought: “Oh my God, this is a television show.”

So Deer began taking notes and scribbling observations. During that time, she made several docs including 2005's *Mohawk Girls*, and 2008's *Club Native*, an emotional experience.

“When it was done, I could not fathom taking on another three-year documentary journey,” she recalls, “I had hit a wall.”

And there it was, Deer's original dream staring straight at her. As a 12-year-old girl she would often fantasize about creating drama one day. Documentary was a detour she fell in love with, and the films she made served as inspiration for the TV series she was thirsty to make since they, too, dealt with themes of identity, belonging, and the female perspective within Deer's community. These were themes Deer was eager to tackle through a different lens. She found herself at a crossroads – with journals full of notes and observations in hand.

Club Native won two Gemini Awards, but Deer was seen as solely a documentary filmmaker. With no track record in drama, she had a big hurdle to overcome. So, she decided to do it on her own by launching a production company, Mohawk Princess Pictures, applying for a Canada Council for the Arts grant and producing a short 15-minute film that she was then able to take back to companies and say: “Here is this idea that I think would rock as a television show. What do you think?”

Deer brought the project to Rezolution Pictures with whom she had previously collaborated and they loved the project. Timing is everything and, at that time, Aboriginal People's Television Network (APTN) had a request for proposals due in just a few weeks – the rush

was on to package, pitch and write the pilot.

Cynthia Knight, who had previously collaborated with Deer on an NFB short, was brought on board to help write the pilot.

“It was such a great, fun experience working with Cynthia,” recalls Deer. “When we were under this big tight deadline, I called (her), told her what was up – the concept ... she was always very, very encouraging and interested in the concept – and [she] jumped right on board.”

Once the series was given a green light, Knight was to become head writer/showrunner and co-executive producer alongside Deer, who would also direct. Together, the duo formed the creative backbone of the show.

“By the time we started working together on *Mohawk Girls*, it was fantastic because we already had sort of a language together,” recounts Knight.

Together, they were able to come up with a pilot pitch package, written in just two weeks. They submitted it along with Deer's short film to give the broadcaster a taste of what was to come.

Their pitch strategy? *Sex and the City* on the rez. It was the ‘instant identifier’ that gave an immediate sense of tone, while situating it in a very different world from Carrie Bradshaw's Manhattan. “For APTN, they're really, really interested in grabbing a bigger audience,” explains Deer. “So, for them, I thought it was a very clear way to sell the project to them and then to the bigger audience.”

Too often, Canadian audiences are weary of aboriginal shows, associating them with being negative, dark or guilt-inflicting, she says. “So, the whole *Sex and the City* pitch on our part is again to relax people and let them know they're in for a good time.”

There are many complicated issues surrounding native people, but there's more to them than just newspaper headlines. “That's [only] one part of their existence,” says Knight. “It's like taking any group



Cynthia Knight (left) and Tracey Deer (right).

of people. There's so many layers and complexities and different points of view." To be able to show that to people in a light, fun and entertaining way was an exciting opportunity and a chance to reach out to a wider audience, she says.

Monika Ille, executive director of programming at APTN, was excited about the prospects for *Mohawk Girls* and the subjects the series was poised to tackle through humour and diverse female characters. This was also a show that targeted an audience of young women, something Ille felt was valuable for the network. So she said, "You know what? Let's do a pilot."

The network invested \$250,000 in a half-hour broadcast pilot. Deer and Knight were determined to make the limited budget work, pulling in numerous favours. It worked — the pilot received a very positive response.

Mohawk Girls, however, sat in queue for about two years. APTN already had a few successful shows on the air and didn't have the resources to add another. "We couldn't just dump a show to pick up another one," says Ille. "So, you kind of had to wait." Ille asked Deer and Knight to stay patient: "I told them 'Trust me. It's going to happen; it's just going to take some time.'"

"Cynthia and I — we were just like, oh my God, it might happen or it might not. It might take 10 years," recalls Deer. They lived in what felt like perpetual limbo.

APTN also needed to secure a broadcasting

partner to get the production budget to where it needed to be. That broadcaster was OMNI.

"They understood that it's not just for native people because it's [about native people]," says Knight. "I mean look at *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*; it resonates for everyone because it's universal ideas and certainly universal to any minority. Their journeys can resonate with us all."

Deer agrees. "There still is this perception that we're very different from one another, that there is this big divide, but, really, we're not that different at all."

"You know, other broadcasters out there don't seem to have an appetite for strong aboriginal content," says Ille, who added OMNI saw beyond that and understood the universality of the series.

And then it happened. "Then it was like OK ... let's make the show," says Deer. "It's been a ride ever since."

In spring 2013, they made the first seven episodes. The network loved them and decided to do six more, to release them as a series of 13. "We are now writing another six," says Deer.

Deer considers the show to be a "dramedy." Although it has its share of dramatic moments, the series is also very funny, grounding its comedic chops in character-derived humour rather than superficial set-ups.

"We always wanted things to feel true to the character and have the comedy and the drama really

Cast of APTN's *Mohawk Girls*.

come from their experiences,” says Knight. “We spent a long time figuring out what the internal conflict was for each character that we see in every scene and every episode and every season.” The comedic approach helps make difficult issues accessible, she said.

Although Deer feels particularly privileged to be able to tell stories about her own people that are very close to her heart, she believes the stories could be a part of any culture. “Cynthia is Jewish, and so a lot of the conversations we’ve had, we’ve really been able to relate with one another even though our worlds are so different,” explains Deer. “I grew up on a reserve, she grew up in Westmount ... but it’s interesting to see how we crossed.

“We absolutely feel that we are tackling many different issues and many nuances within the aboriginal world that are quite universal and extend within any minority culture.”

Deer and Knight made sure everything that went into the show resonated with both of them.

“We always wanted the show to appeal not only to an average audience, but to a non-average audience as well,” says Knight. “So everything that goes into the show is so true to [Tracey’s] experience and her world as an aboriginal woman, a Mohawk woman. And, also, we made sure that it was true to me as a woman of another minority.

“It just happens that this specific world has some of its own rules and challenges, but at its core, issues of self-esteem, self-worth, family relations, relationships with men, identity ... they are things we’re all dealing with.”

Authenticity was also crucial to Deer. “There are times when I think somebody can watch the show and be like ‘Oh my God, that’s crazy. That would never happen,’” she says. “But anyone from Kahnawake, and this is one of the best compliments I’ve been hearing, everyone here who is watching, they’re all standing by what is being shown. They’re all standing by [saying], ‘Oh my God, that is so what it’s like here.’”

Whether crazy or hilarious, Deer believes it’s important to look at yourself in the mirror to see what is great and what needs to change. “But the one thing that hasn’t happened is nobody has been able to say like, ‘Oh that’s a lie. That’s a lie, that’s not true. That’s not how it is.’”

Deer believes *Mohawk Girls* has the potential to find an audience on a more mainstream network, too: “I’m still very hopeful a bigger network is going to come on board. I mean it’s our dream, all of us to get a show like this [that’s] centered around aboriginal characters that is not depressing and dark on a national network. And it’s the goal of APTN as well. APTN wants Canadians to hear our story. I think Canadians are totally ready for something like this.”

To Deer, “aboriginal filmmaking is a brand new flower that’s blooming” with many stories to tell; she believes television, and comedy in particular, is a powerful medium for building bridges between her community and Canadian society.

So is she using television, sweetened with comedy, as a Trojan horse?

“I think it’s proving to be a great way to get into people’s hearts and minds.” ■



Writing clever, not older

By Cameron Archer

Television viewers are likely most familiar with Mike Kiss as the voice of dolphin/chimp/terrier mutant Mister Smarty Smarts on Nelvana's *Spliced!*, a show on which he also served as a writer. Kiss' career has progressed since then — he has been writer/executive story editor for *Grojband*, *Max and Shred* and *My Babysitter's a Vampire*, and co-writer of the 2013 Fresh TV telefilm *Bunks*. Kiss is currently writer/co-executive producer on the first season of Radical Sheep's *Fangbone!*, to air in Canada on Disney XD.

What was the avenue (animation, live-action) you wished to pursue as an aspiring television writer? How did you actually break into the business?

When I first thought about writing for television, I imagined I'd be a joke- or sketch-writer. I saw the kind of stuff [David] Letterman was doing and thought, "Man, I'd love to goof off like this for a living." As I studied screenwriting, stories became more interesting to me than jokes, and I was pulled in several different directions. I had some early work after getting out of school, but I think I really "broke in" by freelancing on a cartoon called *Spliced!* It was like *The Island of Dr. Moreau* for kids. Things kept rolling pretty quickly from there.

What distinctions exist between writing for animation and

writing live-action? Which do you find is more fun, and why?

I enjoy the actual writing a little more in animation simply because you can be pretty wacky most of the time. Animation writers are a bunch of goofballs and writing goofball material is often a lot of fun. Production is done away from your eyes and takes a very long time. You have a bit more freedom on the writing side, but it's often an illusion because you don't know what will happen.

I prefer the overall process of live-action. You work in a room with other writers, make decisions, then watch those decisions play out. It's more collaborative and when you see it shot, react on the floor and move on from there, it's a lot more interesting. You find the strength of an actor, which changes how you write a character. You have production limitations, which have to be accounted for without hurting the writing. It's more active.

How hectic is the writing schedule for children's television?

Writing schedules vary from show to show and depend on a variety of factors. Often, you jump right into the schedule with not a lot of lead time. This isn't a great idea because it leaves everything up to in-the-moment thinking. It's always better to have some time to

figure out how you're going to shape a season and craft characters.

Max and Shred had a very long writing schedule with plenty of lead time, which was great. I've written for animated series with adorably hopeful writing schedules that fall apart immediately. They are replaced by something realistic once it becomes clear that not only can the story editor not deliver that quickly, but the network has no way of reading everything in time to stay on top of things. Most of the time, everything is needed as soon as possible.

What attempts do you take to appeal to a periphery demographic in your shows? For instance, *Spliced!* was fond of absurdist material.

I'll aim for the fringes here and there — a science-fiction joke or a history reference — not for anyone specific, but just for anyone who gets it. The rest of the time, you have to aim at your audience. The voice of the show tells you who that will be, more so than any logline.

I don't think anyone truly knows where the target is, but you should know where it isn't. I just saw *The Penguins of Madagascar* and I don't think I recall any dialogue that wasn't directed at someone my age who may have a young child with him. That seems like a huge mistake to me. Writing clever doesn't mean writing older. ■

Unfair Engagers

The guild has declared the following engagers “unfair” for failing to abide by grievance procedures or the decision of a joint standing committee. The WGC’s working rules prohibit members from working with unfair engagers.

All I Want Productions Inc.

Principal: Kirk Shaw

Battered Productions Inc.

Principal: Kirk Shaw

Christmas Town Productions Inc.

Principal: Kirk Shaw

FOTP Productions Inc.

Principal: Richard Rapkowski

**Guardian Films Inc./
En Garge Films Inc.**

Principal: Kirk Shaw

H & S Films

Principal: Nicolas Stiliadis

Hiding Productions Inc.

Principal: Kirk Shaw

High Seas Rescue Productions Inc.

Principal: F. Whitman Trecartin

Ice Planet (1) Canada Ltd.

Principal: Philip Jackson

Justice Productions Inc.

Principal: Kirk Shaw

Kangaroo Court Productions Ltd.

Principal: Robin Payne

Les Productions les Plus Belles Routes du Monde Inc.

*Principal: Andre Belanger
(not affiliated with Spectra Animation Inc.)*

Lester Beach Entertainment

Principal: Jeff Lester

Mikisew Keemiwan Productions, Ltd.

Principal: Norman Champagne

Nikolai Productions

Principal: Cindy Lamb

Norfolk International Ltd.

Principal: William Macadam

Numb Productions Inc.

Principal: Kirk Shaw

Perfect Stranger Productions Inc.

Principal: Kirk Shaw

Prospero Entertainment Group Inc.

Principal: John Lambert

Richard Lowry Productions Inc.

Principal: Richard Lowry

She Productions Inc.

Principal: Kirk Shaw

Spiritual Productions Inc.

Principal: Kirk Shaw

System Productions Inc.

Principal: Kirk Shaw

T Man Productions Inc.

Principal: Kirk Shaw

Zolar Productions Inc.

Principal: Kirk Shaw

Please Help Us Find These Writers!

The CSCS is holding foreign secondary authors' levies for writers

The Canadian Screenwriters Collection Society (CSCS) is holding foreign secondary authors' levies for a number of writers and uncredited productions. As CSCS does not have a current address for these writers or the productions do not have complete credit information we have not been able to forward any monies to the entitled writers. The complete list of writers and productions is available on the CSCS website at:

www.wgc.ca/cscs/hot_news/index.html

If you have any information that would allow us to contact any of these writers or their agents, or if you are a credited writer on the listed production, please contact:

Marisa King at m.king@wgc.ca

or call (416) 979.7907 ext. 5231 or
1.800.567.9974 ext. 5231.

Please note that CSCS may require writers to furnish contracts in support of their claim. According to CSCS regulations, if a writer does not claim his or her monies within two years of being posted on our website these monies revert to the operating expenses of CSCS.



A Lost Girl no more

By Mark Dillon

Lost Girl, the supernatural drama about everybody's favourite succubus, has wrapped production after five seasons, but you won't find writer/supervising producer Sandra Chwialkowska sulking. In fact, this year is shaping up to be the most exciting yet for the 32-year-old Yale University and Canadian Film Centre grad.

She's developing a one-hour series with Temple Street Productions for a U.S. broadcaster and is attached to an as yet untitled CBC TV movie based on the true story of gun-toting, motorcycle-riding Canadian nurses in World War I. She's also working on *Rollercoaster*, a passion-project feature inspired by her father, Ulrich Chwialkowski, a Polish immigrant who was master planner of the West Edmonton Mall.

She took a latte break recently to talk to *Canadian Screenwriter* about cop and doctor shows, funny business, and panic.

Lost Girl combines fantasy, horror, drama and sentiment, but also lots of laugh-out-loud comedy. Do you gravitate towards humour?

Absolutely. It's something I look for in my work and shows I aspire to be on. If there's an opportunity for a joke, I go that way. And when you're more comfortable,

your writing's going to be better. The jokes were circled and protected in first drafts for *Lost Girl*. Often, on other shows, the jokes are the first to go. Creator Michelle Lovretta, the producers and showrunners take pride in making other people laugh and they look for that in writers.

On the other end of the spectrum is the police procedural Cracked, for which you wrote the "Riverdale Rapist." Does that kind of unsettling material stay with you?

When you're outlining and re-searching and writing, it's disturbing because you have to live and breathe it. You're in that headspace almost constantly. As soon as it's done, it's easier to walk away.

Another cop drama you've worked on is Rookie Blue and you've also written for the medical series Remedy. How do you ramp up before tackling those milieus?

There are two main levels in every episode. There's whatever case or procedure, and for that I spend a long time researching online. I get inspired by any case I find that makes me go 'That's crazy!' or 'How do they do that?' The other level is what character story we want to tell and what's a personal way in for me? Scripts are

better when the writer is putting in some element of themselves or expressing a personal struggle through a character's voice.

You just went through a successful round of pitching in L.A. What is the best advice you ever got on pitching?

Don't tell them what the show is; just tell them the story. I'm so excited and I go get my hair blown out and a manicure. It's the big event. But for the executives I'm pitching to, it's one of 50 pitches they're listening to that week. They must just want to claw their eyes out. But everyone loves a great story. If you watch the body language when you hook them and they begin to lean forward and stop taking notes and listen, you know you've got something.

Did you make a writerly New Year's resolution?

I've had this problem where I'm trying to break an episode and I can't. I think, 'I'll never get this' or 'This sucks!' People tell me I always have that reaction. I forget how to write. I read somewhere that despite that panic you feel, you have to know you're just a minute away from finding a solution. That panic is about holding on to an old idea as opposed to letting go and letting a new idea come. So my resolution is to recognize the panic and let it go. ■

News from WGC Members

Between seasons of *Da Vinci's Demons*, **Will Pascoe** is developing Joe Benitez's *Lady Mechanika* graphic novels into a series for Endemol Studios.

Aron Dunn goes from strength to strength in 2015. He's contributed multiple scripts to *Camp Lakebottom* (Teletoon), *Trucktown* (Treehouse) and *The Insectibles* (KiKA). In February he pitched his company Treason Media's new series concepts at Kidscreen.

Linsey Stewart and **Dane Clark's** feature film directorial debut, *I Put A Hit On You*, had a successful run at The Royal. It's being distributed by Mongrel Media and is now available to rent or buy on iTunes. They're currently developing several features and a TV show.

Josh Sager and **Jerome Simpson's** recent successes include writing *The Bagel Show* with Radical Sheep, *Winston Steinburger* with eOne, and developing two animated series with Yellow Bear Studios. Recent failures include a playdate with their respective dogs, who were uninterested at best.

Chris Pozzebon saw two of his television projects premiere in January 2015. He executive story edited and wrote three episodes of *Schitt's Creek* (CBC, POP). He also developed, co-produced and wrote three episodes of *Open Heart* (YTV, TeenNick).

Kim Izzo's original screenplay idea, *The Shame Sisters*, was chosen as one of the projects for the Script to Screen Program for

development funding. The program is administered through the NSI, Movie Central and Corus.

Sandor Stern's screenplay, *One Eye Charley*, was awarded first place in the historical drama category in the Table Read My Screenplay competition. Of the 1000 screenplays entered in the competition, *One Eye Charley* was one of only three that battled for the overall grand prize.

Charles Dennis is writing and directing a popular web series, *Atwill*, available for viewing on YouTube. Based on Dennis's award-winning film of the same name, it stars Neil Dickson as a former MI5 assassin working in the seamy underbelly of Los Angeles.

After an amazing year on season two of *Bitten*, **Larry Bambrick** is developing a one-hour conspiracy series for Rogers called *Pandora*.

Mark Leiren-Young received the Jack Webster Award for Best Radio Documentary for his CBC IDEAS doc, *Moby Doll: The Whale That Changed the World*. He's currently writing and directing a feature doc about his favourite whale for Middle Child Films.

Karen Lagasse Struck co-wrote a film called *A Girl's Best Friend* with Jim Buck which aired on UP Television in the USA. The movie, directed by Terry Ingram, stars James Denton, Lilah Fitzgerald and Laura Mennell.

Noel Baker wrote four, and co-wrote two, episodes of History

Channel's six-part biker gang infiltration drama, *Gangland Undercover*. The series premiered on History in the U.S. on Feb. 24, and on March 2 in Canada. A second season of the series is in the works.

BD Young had a great year in 2014. After a couple of feature adaptations and a pilot order for a series, he's hoping 2015 turns out to be as good.


Johanna Stein's sitcom pitch for her book, *How Not to Calm a Child on a Plane*, has been bought by CBS. Will Arnett is producing with his Electric Avenue production company. Johanna is co-writing the script with sitcom writer, Adam Barr.

Gary Pearson is co-creator and co-showrunner with Dan Redican of the new sketch comedy series *Sunnyside*, running on City TV and FX Canada.

Laura J. Milliken is working in partnership with Jennifer Podemski to develop a one-hour dramatic series, *The North End*, for APTN. Both will be writing along with their team to generate 13 scripts for the first season.

Tom Mason's 13th *Captain Awesome* book was published in January by Simon & Schuster. He's currently consulting on a new series for Netflix, and writing scripts for a not-yet-announced preschool show for Nickelodeon.

Céline LaFreniere recently published her debut novel, *Glaston*



Town, a rough neighbourhood in a corner of London, is home to a cast of motley characters whose lives, over a decade, are affected by everyday events and drama, but turned upside down when one of them is brutally murdered.

B.C. writer **Roslyn Muir** is a recipient of first to second draft support from the Harold Greenberg Fund for her latest feature, *Freeing Finnegan*, with producer Imperative Pictures.

Writer/director **Wanda Nolan's** short animation *The Mystery of the Secret Room* started production with The National Film Board in January. She is working with animator Claire Blanchet and producer Annette Clarke.

Sugith Varughese, WGC governor on the board of AFBS, has scripted a comic video that will star fellow AFBS members Enrico Colantoni and Tantoo Cardinal as a pair of AFBS "cops" interrogating a new member "suspect" (Michael Xavier) who hasn't filled out his form 18 to set up his AFBS RRSP. The video will play on the updated AFBS website.

David A. Lee and **Daniel Vaillancourt's** *Becoming Barbra*, adapted from William J. Mann's 2013 best-seller *Hello Gorgeous: Becoming Barbra Streisand*, is in development with Los Angeles-based, New Zealander indie film producers Richard Akel and Janice Hammond of Four Stars International.

Vito Viscomi was nominated for a Canadian Screen Award in Best Writing in an Animated Program or Series for his *Nerds and Monsters* script entitled *Franken-Nerd*. He's currently story editing and writing for the second season of Slap Happy Cartoons' hit YTV series *Nerds and Monsters*.

After successful runs at the Calgary and Vancouver International Film Festivals, **Alex Pugsley's** rom-com, *Dirty Singles*, had its Toronto homecoming and first theatrical release at Toronto's Revue Cinema in February. *Dirty Singles* was nominated for Best Canadian Feature at the Vancouver International Film Festival.

Jill Girling and **Lori Mather-Welch**, together with Breakthrough Entertainment, have sold a series to Nickelodeon. It's a half-hour dramedy set at an exclusive equestrian boarding school in the U.K. They are currently in development.

Matt MacLennan was enticed by the Dark Lord, **Dennis Heaton**, to carry out his bidding on season three of *Motive*. He has since roamed the globe looking for a place to happen.

Ari Posner is a writer and supervising producer on the FX comedy, *Married*. He worked on the hour-long drama *Hart of Dixie* for The CW, and is also developing an hour-long medical dramedy with Amaze Entertainment.

Money Monster, written by **Alan DiFiore**, **Jim Kouf** and Jamie

Lindon, made the Black List of the best screenplays of 2014. *Money Monster* is currently in pre-production directed by Jody Foster and starring George Clooney and Julia Roberts.

Arne Olsen has finished the second draft of the feature, *Captain Canuck*, for producer Kevin DeWalt, adapted from the comic book by Richard Comely. The project is currently out to directors. Arne is also developing the half-hour comedy series, *Grandhaven Ghost*, for 9 Story Entertainment.

Terry McGurrin wraps up the new Total Drama series, *The Ridonculous Race*, which he co-story edited with **Alex Ganetakos**, and moves on to join the *Cloudy With A Chance Of Meatballs* writing team.

Kate Barris is happily working in the world of puppets again, as Creative Producer of *Hi Opie!*, a live-action show that gives preschoolers a heads-up about kindergarten. Airing on TVO, it can be seen in the U.S. and U.K. on Netflix.

Donald Martin is writing the feature film *Crescendo* for producer Gale Anne Hurd (*The Terminator*, *The Walking Dead*), based on actual events during World War Two, where Danes saved almost all of Denmark's Jews from the Nazis in a daring covert operation.

Sherold Edwards was nominated for an NAACP Image Award in the writing category for the television movie script he wrote for *A Day Late and a Dollar Short*, shot and edited in Toronto. ■

Welcome

Aaron Abrams Toronto ON
Kevin Abrams Los Angeles CA
Jeff Barnaby Montreal QC
Dan Beirne Toronto ON
Joshua Brandon North Hollywood CA
Aurora Browne Toronto ON
Rosemary Contreras Los Angeles CA
Barry Craigmyle Toronto ON
Erin Curtin Toronto ON
Sophie Deraspe Montreal QC
James Gangl Toronto ON
Tim Gilbert Toronto ON
Rick Groel Pacific Palisades CA
Jason Grote Los Angeles CA
David Handelman Los Angeles CA
Dave Hemstad Toronto ON
Sara Hennessey Toronto ON

Damon Hill Los Angeles CA
Susan Kent Dartmouth NS
Celery Kovinsky Toronto ON
Gerald Lunz Toronto ON
Meredith MacNeill Pictou NS
Michael Milligan Ottawa ON
Adam Moore Los Angeles CA
Kathleen Phillips Toronto ON
Mark Purdy Toronto ON
David West Read New York NY
Patrick Rieger Van Nuys CA
Graeme Stewart Waterloo ON
Justin Varava Glendale CA
Blain Watters Toronto ON
Matt Wayne Sherman Oaks CA
Nina Weinman Los Angeles CA
Megan Wennberg Dartmouth NS

Our condolences

John Fasano Chatsworth CA
Donald Harron Toronto ON
Janet Himmelstein Van Nuys CA

Marlene Matthews La Jolla CA
Richard Nielsen Toronto ON

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Writers Guild
of Canada

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Money for Missing Writers

The Writers Guild of Canada is holding monies for the writers listed below. The WGC has been unable to locate the writers and forward the money to them. If you have any information that would help us reach these writers (or their agents or estates), please contact the staff member indicated below. These writers would thank you.

IPA - contact Paul Caston at p.caston@wgc.ca
1-800-567-9974 ext 5248

Dawn Cumberbatch — *Top Cops*
Elana Devine — *Student Bodies*
Warren Easton — *Odyssey II*
Gerald Fourier — *Littlest Hobo*
John Hollard — *Littlest Hobo*

NFB - contact Paul Caston at p.caston@wgc.ca
1-800-567-9974 ext 5248

Peter Bierman — *Twice Upon a Time*
Mariette Cooke — *Happiness Is Loving Your Teacher*
Gordon Fisher — *Wild in the City*
Ian Ferguson — *Canada's Capital* — *Behind the Scenes*
Laszlo Gefin — *Revolution's Orphans*
William Maylon — *Journey of the Blob*
Daniel Prouty — *For Angela*
Josef Reeve — *Canada Vignettes-NFLD*
Inger Smith — *Wood Mountain Poems*
Janos Szanyi — *Revolution's Orphans*
Gilles Toupin — *Cycling: Still the Greatest*
Peter Vogler — *Ernie's Idea*

CBC-TV - contact Mary Young at m.young@wgc.ca
1-800-567-9974 ext 5236

Fred Adams — *King of Kensington*
Peter R. Churchill — *20/20: Yorkville 1967*
Robert Cooper — *This Land*
Nancy Ryley Denovan (estate) — *The Passionate Canadians:*
Tom Thompson
Ronald Dunn — *Wojeck*
Donald Ettlinger — *Billy Budd*
Mary Fowler — *The Man at the Window*
Lindsay Galloway — *Wojeck*
Geoffrey Gilbert (estate) — *Sidestreet*
David Harriman (Harasti) — *Five Years in the Life*
Robin Herman — *King of Kensington*

Paul Jodoin — *Chez Helene*
Arthur Murphy — *G.M. Theatre: The Death*
Around Us
Gordon Myers — *Dr. Zonk and the Zunkins*
Irving Gaynor Neiman (estate) — *The Greatest Man in*
the World
James Taylor — *Man Alive*
Warner Troyer (estate) — *Front Page Challenge*
Robert Windsor — *King of Kensington*
Unknown writer — *The Nature of Things* (Dutch Elm Disease)
Unknown writer — *Hand & Eye* (Glorious Mud)
Five unknown writers — *CAPAC 50th Anniversary Show*

CBC - RADIO - contact Mary Young at m.young@wgc.ca
1-800-567-9974 ext 5236

Andrew Allan (estate) — *Snow Queen*
Ernst Behrendt — *Quirks & Quarks*
Tony Bell — *Nightfall*
Janet Bonellie — *Nightfall*
Martin Bronstein — *Royal Canadian Air Farce*
Neil Copeland — *Between Ourselves: The Titanic-*
Six Decades of Controversy
Norman Corwin — *Theatre of Freedom*
Dorothy Davis — *Sign Unseen*
Frank Deaville — *Woodhouse & Hawkins*
Ira Dilworth (estate) — *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*
Ted Ferguson — *A Perfectly Happy Life*
Harry E. Foster (estate) — *The German World*
Howard Griffen — *The Duel*
Hugh Kemp — *Stage 47: Two Solitudes*
Peter Lee — *Nightfall*
David Leicester — *Nightfall*
Joseph MacEastern — *Much Ado about Ronnie*
Art McGregor — *Woodhouse and Hawkins*
John McNaught (James Bannerman) — *Wind in the Willows*
Charles Rittenhouse — *The Thirty-Nine Steps*
Samuel Selvon (estate) — *Vanishing Point*
Henry Sobotka (estate) — *Johnny Chase*
Frederick Spoerly — *The Cable Car Incident*

“Oh Great Scribe...”

advice for the scriptlorn

By Harrington Gordonson

Noting that Canadian screenwriters were underserved despite the current proliferation in popular media of advice columns — and never one to let a bandwagon pass — Canadian Screenwriter has commissioned eminent screenwriter Harrington Gordonson as our own sage for seekers: sort of like Dan Savage for the folks who don't get out as much.

Send questions to “Oh Great Scribe,” c/o Canadian Screenwriter (editor@wgc.ca)

Harrison Gordonson is the only living Canadian screenwriter ever to climb Stephen Harper's hair, a 14-hour ordeal outlined in his Giller Prize-winning graphic novel, film and videogame, “HELMUTFALL.” A vial of his tears is encased in every individual Canadian Screen Award. He once screamed at a departing Tsawwassen B.C. ferry — once — and the ferry turned around to pick him up. He solves problems.

Oh Great Scribe — I'm working with a producer who insists that the show is “not a showrunner show.” But when I said, “OK, do you have a Bible?” he handed me six napkins and a doodle of an alpaca lawyer. I should probably not take the gig, right?

This reminds me of a guy I knew years ago. An eccentric producer friend of mine named his dog Showrunner. It was funny at first. “*Beg, showrunner,*” he'd say. Lots of jokes about how he could get Showrunner to hump his leg by holding up a sausage roll. But then the stupid dog ran away. So, my producer friend wanted to put up signs in the neighbourhood offering a reward. He wouldn't let me help him write the signs, so the phone

number was wrong, and instead of describing the dog, he inserted a description of a Norwegian forest cat. Then, instead of a picture of Showrunner, he included a picture of Benji because, he felt, an image of a well-known American dog would attract more readers. I tried to tell him that nobody under the age of 50 remembered Benji and he was better off using his own dog. But he insisted Benji was as famous a dog as he could afford and it would all work out. Anyway, unsurprisingly, he got no calls, and, of course, blamed Showrunner for that. But he also withdrew the reward offer because he found out he was mistaken about there being a Canadian Lost Dog Fund and he didn't want to raise the \$100 himself. But it all worked out. A year later, I ran into Showrunner in the Maple Leaf Lounge at LAX. He seemed happy with his life partner, Hobo. Turns out that one really did settle down.

Oh Great Scribe — What is the deal with the CBC? I mean, really. My God. I mean, really? Really?

Now it can finally be told. The CBC isn't just going up Schitt's

Creek. The savvy and recently ambitious turn in their scripted programming isn't a fluke. I'm pleased to announce that for the last several months you've all been witnessing my latest work unspool: the Living Pilot for a revolutionary new entertainment concept. In Phase One, CBC executives were all tagged and released into the wilds of the Toronto Broadcast Centre. Each morning, the Mail Robot releases a psychotropic mist that increases levels of paranoia and aggression. In Phase Two, we're going to give all the executives swords, a Big Ears teddy bear and copies of Richard Stursberg's biography. Then, we eliminate one on-air-personality and one exec each week via a Battle of the Blades. Wait until you see what happens with Hubert. You're going to Fall for CBC all over again.

Oh Great Scribe — Should I feel guilty because I don't Crave Showmi?

Originally, I had a Netflix joke here, but it's unfortunately been deleted and I've been instructed to say officially it never happened. Oh Canada. You so crazy. ■

February

23-March 1 — Canadian Screen Week academy.ca

27-March 1 — Women Making Waves Conference wift-at.com

March

1 — Canadian Screen Awards Broadcast Gala, CBC academy.ca

3 — *Deadline* — Independent Production Fund, Webseries ipf.ca

3 — *Deadline* — Cogeco Fund, Development cogecofund.ca

3 — *Deadline* — Cogeco Fund, Production cogecofund.ca

4-6 — Prime Time in Ottawa primetimeinottawa.ca

6-8 — Vancouver Web Fest vancouverwebfest.com

12 — Writers Talking TV, TIFF Bell Lightbox wgc.ca

April

27 — WGC Screenwriting Awards wgc.ca

May

TBA — TO WebFest towebfest.com

21-31 — Inside Out Toronto, LGBT Film Festival insideout.ca

June

7-10 — Banff World Media Festival banffmediafestival.com

13-16 — Toronto Animation Arts Festival International taafi.com

30 — Writers Talking TV, TIFF Bell Lightbox wgc.ca



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THE 19TH ANNUAL



WGC SCREENWRITING AWARDS

CELEBRATING CANADA'S SCREENWRITERS

THE WRITERS GUILD OF CANADA CONGRATULATES THE 2015 FINALISTS

ANIMATION

The Day My Butt Went Psycho, Season 1 "Everybooty Loves the Great White Butt" • Written by **Craig Martin**

Fangbone, Season 1 "The Warbrute of Friendship" • Written by **Simon Racioppa & Richard Elliott**

Johnny Test, Season 6 "Johnny's Junky Trunk" • Written by **Sean Jara**

Nerds and Monsters, Season 1 "Kaboom With a View" • Written by **Greg Sullivan**

CHILDREN & YOUTH

Annedroids, Season 1 "New Pals" • Written by **J.J. Johnson & Christin Simms**, Teleplay by **J.J. Johnson**

R.L. Stine's The Haunting Hour, Season 4 "Goodwill Toward Men" • Written by **Dan Angel & Billy Brown**

R.L. Stine's The Haunting Hour, Season 4 "Mrs. Worthington" • Written by **Melody Fox**

Some Assembly Required, Season 1 "Dance Crew Evolution" • Written by **Cole Bastedo & Jenny Siddle**

You & Me, Season 1 "Ninja Squirrel" • Written by **Katherine Sandford**

DOCUMENTARY

The Cholesterol Question • Written by **Michael McNamara**

Norman McLaren: Animated Musician • Written by **Donald McWilliams**

Shameless Propaganda • Written by **Robert Lower**

MOVIES & MINISERIES

The Best Laid Plans "You Has An Option, Sir" • Written by **Jason Sherman and Susan Coyne**

Elephant Song • Written by **Nicolas Billon**

Sex and Violence, Season 1 "Surface Scars" • Written by **Thom Fitzgerald**

SHORTS & WEBSERIES

Bill & Sons Towing, Season 2 "Cleaning House" • Written by **Mark De Angelis**

Darknet "Episode 3" • Written by **Doug Taylor**

Darknet "Episode 5" • Written by **Randall Cole**

Out With Dad, Season 3 "Outed" • Written by **Jason Leaver**

Ruby Skye P.I.: The Maltese Puppy "Everyone's a Suspect" • Written by **Jill Golick and Julie Strassman**

TV COMEDY

Mister D, Season 3 "Old School" • Written by **Andrew De Angelis**

Sensitive Skin, Season 1 "Not the Haitian Corpse" • Written by **Bob Martin**

This Hour Has 22 Minutes, Season XXI "Episode 16" • Written by **Mark Critch, Shaun Majumder, Mike Allison, Bob Kerr, Susan Kent, Greg Thomey, Jon Blair, Sonya Bell, Abdul Butt, Tim Polley, Heidi Brander, Adam Christie, Kevin Shustack, Jeremy Woodcock** • Contributing Writers: **Dean Jenkinson, Ron Sparks**

Trailer Park Boys, Season 8 "Episode 4" • Written by **Mike Smith & JP Tremblay & Robb Wells**

TV DRAMA

19-2, Season 1 "Partners" • Adapted by **Bruce M. Smith**

Lost Girl, Season 4 "La Fae Époque" • Written by **Michael Grassi**

Orphan Black, Season 2 "Ipsa Scientia Potestas Est" • Written by **Tony Elliott**

Saving Hope, Season 3 "The Way We Were" • Written by **John Krizanc**

Strange Empire, Season 1 "The Oath" • Written by **Jackie May**

**WINNERS OF THE 19TH ANNUAL WGC SCREENWRITING AWARDS
WILL BE ANNOUNCED MONDAY, APRIL 27, 2015**

**RYAN BELLEVILLE WILL HOST THE 2015 WGC SCREENWRITING AWARDS
AWARDS TICKET INFORMATION COMING SOON TO WWW.WGC.CA**



Writers Guild of Canada