

CANADIAN

CANADA \$7 SUMMER 2015 VOL.17, NO.3

# SCREENWRITER

FILM | TELEVISION | RADIO | DIGITAL MEDIA

The 2015 WGC Screenwriting  
Awards – The Screenwriters  
Take The Spotlight

‘To Banff’ Or  
‘Not To Banff’

The State Of  
Canadian Comedy

Writing For Youth

## X Company

Stephanie Morgenstern and Mark Ellis  
Reveal Canada’s Secret Spy School

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# CANADIAN SCREENWRITER

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## Yippee-ki-yay

It can be a frustrating time to be a writer, with virtually every medium that features the product of writers undergoing upheaval.

I guess, when you take into consideration the general personality disorders that create writers, it can always be a frustrating time to write.

So why do we bother? We are regularly told our craft is outdated or we're too old or too young, or fill in the blank.

When I worked at a newspaper in the late '90s, one of the sales people left to work at a radio station.

She popped in one day, after taking some sort of course for selling radio time, and gloated about the speed of radio, the immediacy.

"The written word is a dinosaur," she said.

When asked who told her that, she said she read it in one of the books she was given for her radio course. I don't think she understood why everyone laughed.

And then there are people like Joseph Kay — featured in this edition as a subject of one of our W-Files. He went through all the trouble of becoming a lawyer. And not just any lawyer, but a Bay Street lawyer.

But even attaining that level of success in a very challenging profession did not quench the creative fire.

He had to be a writer.

We all write for lots of reasons. We have stories to tell, messages, lessons, and morals to get across. We have context.

While I was thinking about the challenges facing writers today, I realized I was dying to know who had written that line about the written word being a dinosaur. I asked around. A handout for some radio courses had a bunch of quotes thought to be useful in countering objections a potential client might have to advertising on radio instead of newspapers. Apparently the line had been cropped from the book *The Last Word: Tales from the Tip of the Mother Tongue*, by Ben Macintyre, and was a paraphrase of a quote from Bruce Willis who was saying that movie reviews, like most of the written word, were going the way of the dinosaur because they were only for people who still read. Which raises the question about the scripts that, um, movies and television shows start with.

The woman didn't know what the context was for his comment. The person who gathered the quotes for the handout either didn't know or didn't care about the context. Clearly Bruce Willis didn't realize how silly his comment was, in the context of how he makes a living. You know, reading words.

Yippee-ki-yay. ■

— Tom Villemaire

### Spring 2015

**Michael Amo** has written Gemini-nominated TV movies. He also created the *The Listener*. Presently, he's developing a project with Sony Pictures Television. He lives with his family in Nova Scotia.

**Cameron Archer** runs the Canadian television/media website Gloryosky (<http://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 Gopic** is a Toronto-based freelance photographer specializing in portrait, event and documentary photography.

John Hunter produced **Jim Henshaw**'s first feature script "A Sweeter Song." To date, Jim has written and produced hundreds of hours of Prime Time series as well as several movies.

**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.

**Dani Ng-See-Quan** is a digital content manager, freelance writer, and former Associate Editor of *Playback*. She is inspired and (slightly) intimidated by screenwriters and loves to geek out hearing stories from the writers' rooms.

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



## N.S. premier reverses promise on tax break

*Michael Amo is the WGC councillor for the Atlantic region*

My, but we do have our share of characters here in Nova Scotia.

The sleaze-fuelled car salesman "Fitz" Fitzpatrick. The explosively needy Mr. D. The scarily sensual Babe Bennett. The fearless Marg Delahunty. The magnificently moist Raj Binder. These are just some of the creations that allow us to punch miles above our weight in the personality department.

Need I mention the Trailer Park Boys? You'd have to be smoking kitty litter not to know that Bubbles, Ricky, and Julian have put Nova Scotia on the map in a way that no milquetoast tourist ad ever could.

And then there's Stephen McNeil. If you're not a fan of our politics, he was the former appliance repair shop owner who won our hearts as the new leader of the provincial Liberals. Check out this clip of him on the campaign trail in 2013, chatting up some game developers, promising to extend our Film Tax Credit by another five years.

Go to YouTube and search: Stephen McNeil's broken film tax credit promise.

It's like some late-arriving audition tape for "Freaks and Geeks." So sweet. So genuine. So Principal Skinner. Now this is a media-savvy nerd I could vote for.

Flash forward to April 2015 and something changed. Right. He got elected.

Tough choices to be made. An axe to be swung. A deficit to be very loudly, very publicly attacked. Out goes the five-year extension on the existing tax credit — the one Mr. McNeil promised — *promised* to maintain — replaced by one a fraction of its former self.

Whether you accepted the CMPA's figures (\$122 million in 2013-2014) or the government's numbers (\$66.8 million in production volume and \$39.4 million in salaries and wages for the same period), the original \$24 million a year price tag seemed reasonable for all we add to the provincial culture and economy.

There are more than 2000 highly-skilled people in our business and we're the ones who give voice to these shows seen around the world. As is always the case on the East Coast, we will now have to do a lot more with much less as we continue to attract cold hard cash and international acclaim to a province in dire need of both.

I guess that is what's called a "character building" experience. ■

— **Michael Amo**

## Independent Production Agreement Ratified

Canadian screenwriters and producers have put into effect the new collective agreement governing English-language screenwriting in Canada. The Writers Guild of Canada (WGC), the Canadian Media Production Association (CMPA), and the Association Québécoise de la Production Médiatique (AQPM) announced on March 16, 2015, that all parties ratified the new writers' Independent Production Agreement (IPA).

This agreement sets the terms of engagement until December 31, 2017. Contracts dated March 16, 2015 or after will fall under the new agreement. Contracts dated before will be governed by the prior agreement, regardless of when they go into production.

The new rate sheet, contract and VRA forms are posted on the WGC website, under the "agreements and signatories" section. If you have any questions about the new agreement, please don't hesitate to contact WGC staff.

## "Let's Talk TV" Outcomes

In February and March of 2015, the CRTC released a series of decisions based on its major review of television policy, called "Let's Talk TV." The impact that the decisions may have raises questions for writers, some of which are answered in a Q&A with WGC Executive Director Maureen Parker in the pages of this magazine. While the decisions are extensive, the following list includes some of the key elements:

- Retain simultaneous substitution, except for the Super Bowl and for discretionary channels
- For conventional stations, eliminate daytime exhibition requirements while retaining those for primetime, and for discretionary chan-

nels harmonize exhibition requirements at (a generally reduced) 35%

- Retain spending requirements for Canadian programming and "programs of national interest"
- Eliminate the genre exclusivity policy for discretionary channels
- Introduce certification "pilot projects" for drama/comedy productions that are adaptations of Canadian novels or that cost over \$2 million per hour, which will require that the screenwriter(s) be Canadian
- Eliminate the requirement that broadcasters sign a Terms of Trade Agreement with the CMPA
- Maintain a hands-off approach to regulating "over-the-top" services such as CraveTV, shomi, and Netflix
- Unbundle cable/satellite TV packages

The ultimate impacts of these decisions will take months or, perhaps, years to become clear. Where these decisions affect screenwriters, the WGC will ensure that the CRTC and the federal government are made aware, and the guild will advocate for changes where necessary.

## Guild Protests Nova Scotia Government's Tax Credit Slash

The WGC protested the Nova Scotia government's decision to cut the Film Industry Tax Credit, essentially reducing its value by 75%. The province's Liberal government stated that Nova Scotia had among the most generous provincial tax credits in the country, but the WGC felt that the projected cut rendered it among the least effective. An initial statement from

the Nova Scotia government said that 75% of the tax credit would remain as a non-refundable credit, meaning that that portion would likely be unavailable for what tax credits are used for: financing production. The Nova Scotia government emphasized the costs of the tax credit, but it appeared unaware of the significant benefits, such as jobs and economic value created by the sector. According to Screen Nova Scotia, more than 50 documentary, film, and television projects have been completed with the assistance of the tax credit, including many productions written by WGC members, such as *The Book of Negroes*, *This Hour Has 22 Minutes*, *Mr. D*, *Trailer Park Boys*, *Relative Happiness*, and *Call Me Fitz* among others. The WGC asked the Nova Scotia government to reconsider what was a deeply flawed proposal and to retain a tax credit that would work for the province's film and television sector. After news-making industry protest, the province announced a 25% all-spend tax break, replacing an existing incentive that offsets up to 65% of labour costs.

## Screenwriters Get Social at the TSC

The Toronto Screenwriters Conference, held in early April, was a weekend of craft-focused sessions at Daniels Spectrum in Toronto. The conference featured WGC member Bruce Smith (showrunner, *19-2*) who led a small group of writers in a "writing room intensive," to develop a "tent-pole" episode of the show. WGC members Ian Carpenter, Roslyn Muir, Amanda Smith-Kolic, Tamara Moulin, and Nathalie Younglai were selected to participate. As well, the WGC and the TSC co-presented the "Screenwriters Social," a chance for writers to compare notes on the conference sessions and network. ■

# Let's Talk TV: Q&A with Maureen Parker

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by Neal McDougall

*The CRTC released a series of decisions in March following its “Let’s Talk TV” policy proceeding, and those decisions touch almost all aspects of the Canadian television system. What’s the take-away for Canadian screenwriters? WGC Executive Director Maureen Parker weighs in.*

**Q:** Did the CRTC tear down the system this spring? Should writers be looking for an apartment in L.A.?

**A:** No, the CRTC has not torn down the system. There was a lot of negative rhetoric around Chairman Jean-Pierre Blais’ speech on March 12, and unfortunately some of it was generated by the speech itself. But we wound up keeping a number of the fundamentals, most importantly the spending requirements for the big corporate broadcast groups like Bell, Shaw, and Rogers. We’ve always argued that spending requirements are the best way to ensure broadcasters invest in Canadian content. We got that in 2010 and we’re keeping it, which is good news. We did lose on other things — on exhibition requirements, on the experiment that is unbundling — but I think we kept what was most important. As well, the CRTC noted the importance of writers through two new “pilot projects.” One is for adaptations of Canadian novels, the other for programs with budgets over \$2 million per hour. Both must have Canadian screenwriters to be certified as Canadian.

**Q:** The CRTC talked a lot about shifting “from quantity to quality.” What does that mean?

**A:** I know a lot of screenwriters were bothered by those statements, and I completely understand why. When we were at the hearings in Ottawa last September we talked specifically about this issue — how you need quantity to experiment, to see what works, and to maintain a talent pool. You need quantity to get quality. But when you look closely at the actual policy decisions, the main thing the Commission did connected to that issue was reduce exhibition requirements somewhat. They did that not to reduce quantity of *production*, but because broadcasters were meeting the requirements by airing repeats. The WGC doesn’t agree with excessive repeats either — we want

broadcasters to make new, fresh shows. So, when we talk “quantity and quality,” we need to ask, what’s the “quantity” that we’re talking about reducing — production, or repeat airings, or what? Of course, the Commission probably also believes that we should be making fewer, bigger shows, and there are indications of that in the policy decisions. But there’s nothing in the March announcements that will necessarily reduce quantity of production.

**Q:** What does the elimination of daytime exhibition requirements mean for kids’ programming?

**A:** This change only affects private conventional stations — the over-the-air channels like CTV and Global. Those broadcasters had already abandoned children’s programming a long time ago. Specialty channels typically haven’t had different daytime vs. primetime requirements to begin with, and while their overall exhibition requirements have been reduced, their spending requirements still exist. The Commission said exhibition requirements weren’t working, and if that’s true then there shouldn’t be much change. Unbundling will affect specialty channels, but we don’t see it affecting children’s channels any more negatively than other channels. In fact, kids’ channels like YTV are very successful and seem up to the challenge. In the March 12 decision the Commission specifically emphasized the importance of children’s programming, committing to creating a new dedicated category for children’s, so that they can better monitor it. Children’s programming is also still part of PNI — programs of national interest — when it’s considered “drama,” which is subject to a spending requirement.

**Q:** What does unbundling mean for the system?

**A:** The short answer is we just don’t know. For one thing, cable companies can still sell large packages of channels, and will likely price those packages in ways to keep them attractive. While some people might only want two or three channels, many people are part of a household, and households have a mix of interests. That said, less popular channels will feel the pinch, and we do expect to lose some of those sooner or later. ■

A photograph of a yellow biplane in a museum. The plane is the central focus, with its wings and propeller clearly visible. In the background, other aircraft are partially visible, including a white one with a glass cockpit. The lighting is dramatic, with the yellow of the plane standing out against the darker background.

# THE X FILE

By Matthew Hays

Canada's little known past as a  
secret-agent incubator is feted with  
the series *X Company*



*Stephanie Morgenstern and Mark Ellis, X Company's secret weapon.*

The story behind Camp X is so astonishing, so surreal, and so unbelievable, that perhaps what's most remarkable is that it took this long to be turned into a hit TV series. A training ground for secret agents, located on Lake Ontario, whose graduates include Ian Fleming, Roald Dahl, *Goldfinger* screenwriter Paul Dehn, and several of the architects of the CIA? It's true, but Camp X has been one of Canada's best-kept historical secrets, in part because much of the government documentation about its existence was classified until the 1980s.

Enter Stephanie Morgenstern and Mark Ellis, the producer-writer team behind the landmark cop series *Flashpoint*, who are now writing season two of *X Company*, the breakneck-paced show about a tightly-knit group of agents trained at Camp X to take on the Nazis.

"This is one of the great untold Canadian war stories, without a doubt," says Morgenstern. "There's very little that has been written about it. But the story is amazing — it was the first spy training camp in North America."

Camp X was established on the shore of Lake Ontario in 1941 as a joint effort of the British, Americans, and Canadians. Canada was chosen, in part, to link the Americans and the British while allowing the Americans to circumvent the Neutrality Act which isolationists enacted to keep the U.S. out of Britain's conflict with the Nazis. The idea of using the camp as a spot to hatch various WWII adventures appealed to Morgenstern and Ellis, who have a long-standing fascination with the period.

In 2001, they collaborated on an 18-minute film, *Remembrance*, about a couple struggling against

horrific odds during the Second World War. One of the characters in the short had a hyper-developed memory, meaning he recorded everything he saw and experienced. "Our question was: what would the war be like for someone who remembered absolutely everything?" Morgenstern recalls.

They never made any secret about the fact that *Remembrance* was a calling-card film; they hoped the 18-minute short would inspire producers to back a feature-length version of the story. "But it all got put on a distant back burner as *Flashpoint* became the distraction," recalls Morgenstern.

When *Flashpoint*'s four-year run ended in 2012, Morgenstern and Ellis returned to the ideas they had hatched in *Remembrance*. And, as they delved into more research, they came across the stories about Camp X.

"It was astonishing to us on several levels," says Ellis. "We didn't understand why this bit of history wasn't being taught in every high school in the country. Every kid should know about this legacy. I guess it's our legendary modesty, that Canadians didn't want to take credit for the camp. We wanted to push up against that. It was the first spy school of its kind. The other thing that was appealing was that the camp trained Americans, Britons and Canadians, so it would make for an international group of characters. That made it a very Canadian story, but also a universal one."

A shift came in the Morgenstern-Ellis team's post-*Flashpoint* world: "We were so much more excited by TV writing," says Morgenstern. "The depth you can delve into with TV writing just seemed like we could take the story in so many different directions."

"This is one of the great untold Canadian war stories, without a doubt. There's very little that has been written about it. But the story is amazing — it was the first spy training camp in North America."



*Canadian history is engaging television with CBC's X Company.*

Having stewarded their own hit show, Morgenstern and Ellis were adamant about maintaining creative control over X Company. “We spoke directly to the CBC and formed our own production company,” says Ellis. “We filed our own CMF (Canada Media Fund) applications and hired our own writers. We briefly considered making it a contemporary show, but really liked the idea of setting it during the Second World War. We wrote a bible and two scripts. Then we went to Temple Street Productions and they liked the idea. So, the financing came later in the creative process, which is new.”

For the bible, a tone was settled on — one based on a careful equation. While the spy camp is based on a real one, the characters and scenarios would be fictional. “That just seemed far simpler, to settle on that upfront,” explains Morgenstern. “We could take creative liberties while trying to keep things authentic. That meant we could take large-scale liberties. In reality, the camp wasn’t a major command centre, but, in our show, it is.”

“It’s not our job to be authentic to the facts of history, at least not precisely,” says Ellis. “That’s the job of documentary and docudrama. We wanted an emotional authenticity for our characters, to show

how they would feel if they were thrown behind enemy lines. Having to make split-second, life-or-death decisions on the fly, that’s the emotional story we wanted to get to.”

“If we could, we wanted to explore a secret-agent reality,” adds Morgenstern. “More than what we mostly see, which is a Bond film or a comedy about secret agents. When you have bloodied hands, what do you do the next day? What is the post-traumatic stress of being responsible for the decision you make and your actions? We don’t really see the emotional reality of that explored in any depth.”

While the individual stories are fictional, the ideas were often inspired by real events. “We have an episode with a seven-year-old girl who lives in a town in France that’s occupied by the Nazis,” says Morgenstern. “It’s partly inspired by the story of my stepmother, who was exposed to living very close to the occupier during the war. And, of course, there were such horrific crimes committed during the Second World War. The Germans attempted to annihilate an entire village in France, something we built on, too.”

“Sometimes we’d just be struck by an image,” says Ellis. “I saw a photo of an unexploded bomb. But it turns out it had been defused on purpose so it



would never work. Someone had put a Star of David inside the bomb. We wanted to share that story with the public.”

The vast majority of the writing of season one took place in Toronto. And for that, Morgenstern and Ellis drew in people who had a similar fascination with history and the Second World War specifically.

“We did a great deal of research, just as we had on *Flashpoint*,” says Daniel Godwin, one of the series’ writers. “What struck me is how very, very young a lot of the people who were heading into combat were. One of our characters is 19 — still just a kid, really. But that was the reality. We also took the specific year into account: it was 1942, and, at that point, it really wasn’t clear who was going to win. Things were very desperate.”

Godwin adds that “the older I get, the more fascinated I am by World War Two. I didn’t know

anything about Camp X. It’s strange how well they’ve been able to keep that secret. You don’t want to be ahistorical while you’re writing, but, of course, you’re creating something unreal at the same time.”

“I would say the neglect of history in our schools is almost criminal,” says Denis McGrath, also a series writer. “The history kids are taught is very basic; there’s very little about World War Two. We are under-taught when it comes to history. What can episodic TV do well? Can fiction get to a greater truth? These were questions we were thinking of as we wrote.”

“I didn’t realize how much I knew about the Nazis,” says Hannah Moscovitch, another series writer. “It’s a pretty dark and morbid fascination I’ve held for a long time. I think, with this blend of fact and fictional story lines, we were clear that there was a difference between authenticity and accuracy. We

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“It was astonishing to us on several levels. We didn’t understand why this bit of history wasn’t being taught in every high school in the country. Every kid should know about this legacy.”

may not have every detail down, but we were trying to create a feel of what it would be like to live in World War Two.”

Despite her extensive knowledge of the Second World War, it was also “really exciting for me to be writing for a show about Camp X, precisely because I didn’t know anything about it going in.

“When I read the bible, that drew me in. The shadow warfare was fascinating — the idea of people fighting the war in underhanded ways. I knew nothing about that. The battles we hear about. Secret agents tend to keep things secret.”

If there was one thing the writers underestimated, it was how crucial a role geography would play in *X Company*. All of the writers say being in Europe informed their ideas and impressions as they wrote. And for season one, Morgenstern and Ellis didn’t plan to bring any of their writing team to Hungary during the shoot, something they realized was a mistake [once they entered] production.

“The writing continues during production,” Morgenstern says. “If a location wasn’t available, or something else changed, we had to adapt to curveballs all the time.”

“If you’re in Hungary, and you’re writing a scene about a train,” says Godwin, “then they’ll give you a book of photos of 20 trains, and you can choose among them. The settings would look entirely as you’d pictured them. The logistics impacted the writing. You really felt like you could attain a look of authenticity — it was amazing how real they could make it look.”

“Every day, when we would drive out to the studio, we would pass by the main synagogue in Budapest,” says McGrath. “That’s a sacred place, a shrine. All of the names of those who were rounded

up (are) in a memorial there. You see everything while you’re there — you see bullet holes in buildings that we were filming in. You saw the war all the time, and reminders of it, and then you’d see the reminders of what communism had done, too. There was no way to escape it. So history feels alive and real there. That fire is still smoldering.”

As the writers’ room launches into season two, there are notable shifts in procedure. The second round will feature serialized stories that run throughout ten episodes, as opposed to the episodic form. “Rather than have ten episodes that have a theme, this will be more like ten chapters of the same novel,” says Ellis.

And as they ponder their latest series, Morgenstern and Ellis can’t help but compare the experience to creating *Flashpoint*. “It does feel miles away,” Ellis concedes. “I remember a CBS executive saying to me in the second season to not even think about doing anything with the characters for at least the first few seasons. It was all about the case of the week.”

“They specifically requested that episodes could be broadcast in any order,” says Morgenstern. “Not so with this show, where we’re really building characters and ongoing storylines. *Flashpoint* had a morality to each episode. *X Company* is far less wholesome. *Flashpoint* had a compulsory, reassuring conclusion at the end of each episode. But the law means nothing in *X Company*. In this world, we’re the outlaws.”

“In *Flashpoint*, shooting a gun was the last resort,” adds Ellis. “In *X Company*, people shoot first and ask questions later.”

Morgenstern pauses, and then offers her final assessment: “*X Company* is the world of *Flashpoint* turned inside out.” ■

# TO BANFF OR NOT TO BANFF?

By Diane Wild

There aren't many cities used as a verb. Vancouvering: Could that mean "dodging rain"? But Banffing occurs each June when progressively more bleary-eyed industry professionals

walk the halls of the four-day Banff World Media Festival and warm the seats at St. James's Gate pub after hours.

Over the past 35 years, industry professionals of all stripes have filled the Banff Springs Hotel. With a registration rate of \$1,595 this year plus travel, hotel and not-inconsiderable food and beverage expenses, the cost of attendance can be high and the return on investment intangible. So, the big question is: Do writers have to do Banff to further their careers?

The answer, of course, is no. Tassie Cameron of *Rookie Blue* is among the high-profile Canadian showrunners who have done pretty well for themselves without it (though she did attend for 24 hours last year when she received the Sea to Sky Innovative Producer Award). "I'm hopeless when it comes to festivals and conferences," she says. "Never have time to do them."

Sarah Dodd, currently on *Motive*, also fulfills her networking and pitching needs elsewhere. "In my experience, all of the local production companies are eager to hear new ideas. If I had something I was excited about, I'd arrange a bunch of coffee dates with producers and take it from there."

For some writers, Banff's scope – all genres of television and digital media – works against it. Shirley Hoffman and partner Robert Pincombe funded a trip in 2013, when there was a focus on children's programming and their first season of animated *Camp Lakebottom* premiered.

Without those particular circumstances, "we'd have to be going there very specifically for a show that

had a lot of heat," Hoffman says. "I hope I get to do it again, but, for us, Kidscreen is more effective in terms of what we can get out of it."

If Banff isn't a necessity, why has someone like *Motive* showrunner Dennis Heaton gone more than 10 times? It can't all be the allure of those magnificent Rocky Mountains. "It's definitely worth it. I always find it interesting how writers are very reluctant to invest in themselves, even for things as simple as buying the right software," he says. "It's an odd mentality. You're investing in yourself and investing in your career. It's all about relationships in this industry. Why wouldn't you go somewhere where you can form those relationships?"

"The best piece of advice I got from a producer friend of mine was 'Don't go there to pitch. Go there to build relationships,'" he adds. "I've gone as a producer paying my own way to take meetings, I've gone as a writer being taken by a production company to do a specific pitch to somebody, I've gone as a writer as part of the showrunner program, and I've gone as a layabout who hung around in the bar all day to talk to people. Through it all, that advice has been proven to be entirely true."

Historically, Heaton says, Banff was The Place To Be, but he thinks it may be declining in importance. "It doesn't have to be Banff, but Banff is a good one because it's very much TV and transmedia skewed so a lot of producers show up." As a Vancouver-based writer, he sees the trip as "better than a thousand-dollar coffee in Toronto."

“In my experience, all of the local production companies are eager to hear new ideas. If I had something I was excited about, I’d arrange a bunch of coffee dates with producers and take it from there.”



“I’m hopeless when it comes to festivals and conferences. Never have time to do them.”

“It’s all about relationships in this industry. Why wouldn’t you go somewhere where you can form those relationships?”



*From top to bottom: Sarah Dodd, Tassie Cameron, and Dennis Heaton*



Above: Shirley Hoffman and Robert Pincombe;  
Right: Adam Barken

“When it comes to writers, we can be quite invisible to the rest of the industry if we don’t stand up and say ‘I’m over here and this is what I’m like to deal with.’”

Adam Barken, currently of *Killjoys* and *X Company*, has gone three times, including once as part of the showrunner program. “For me as a Toronto-based writer, it was great to meet non-Toronto based producers and executives.”

His first time involved 15 pitches in the three days. “That in itself was worth it. At that time in my career I didn’t have a lot of avenues to do that. At Banff, producers were very open to meeting me in a way they weren’t otherwise.”

“It was a great experience, but it’s not like it ended up getting me a lot of work,” he cautions. “If your goal is to go and simply sell your wares, no, Banff is not necessary. But it’s a great way to make contacts in a short amount of time.”

As an example, he mentioned maintaining a relationship with a network executive he first met at Banff who’s now a development executive with a production company he’s in talks with for a project. “It’s an industry with people with long careers who move around. You want to stay in touch with people and build long-lasting relationships.”

“The busier you get, the more networking falls by the wayside,” Barken says. “You can come out of a show or a run of shows and suddenly you’re thinking ‘I don’t know as many people as I did before.’ It’s not easy but it’s so important.” He encourages writers to look for opportunities to have their way paid.

Achilles Media, who run the festival, declined to comment on this article – a sign of how crucial they view writers as a paying market? – but they

do offer sponsored programs for emerging and established writers to attend and get intimate access to showrunners and development executives.

Using the festival’s Connect program and delegates list to book meetings with decision-makers is a common theme in how writers prepare for Banff.

“Higher-up broadcasters are hard to meet as they book up really quickly,” says Hoffman. “You have to get in there as quick as you possibly can with a fun, bouncy, but to-the-point message that they’ll want to read.”

Her practical advice to ensure you don’t miss out on those hard-won meetings: Make sure you know what the person you’re meeting looks like, and be as specific as possible about where.

As for the meetings themselves, some writers prefer a meet-and-greet and only pitch when asked, while others feel more comfortable using it as a pitch session. Heaton, for example, says: “If they asked me what I’m working on I’ll tell them, but I never went in with documents in the fancy binder when I was going by myself.”

Hoffman says: “We went in to soft pitch, but at any conference it’s about personal connections. In live action there are more writers’ rooms. We can do a whole season with people and never actually see them face to face.”

“When it comes to writers, we can be quite invisible to the rest of the industry if we don’t stand up and say ‘I’m over here and this is what I’m like to deal with.’”

“I’m an over-planner, so I work really hard to make it seem off the cuff,” says Barken. “It takes a lot of planning to seem spontaneous.” He hones the



“Don’t go thinking  
you’re going to make  
your millions”

writing and uses cue cards until the pitch “seems like second nature.”

“Ideally, you want to say you’ve got something to show and you’re going to have at least a few pages written up. Nobody wants to carry paper around though – you follow up with a package.”

Besides the networking and pitching opportunities, Heaton and Barken both point to the panels and master classes as valuable opportunities to hear from showrunners they admire on the rare occasions they’ve had time to attend panels between meetings.

So, if it’s not strictly necessary, is Banff worth it?

“It’s a great place to go if you have a particularly reasonable goal,” says Barken. “Don’t go thinking you’re going to make your millions.”

“Think about how it’s going to help your long game,” advises Heaton. “If you’ve got the pitch and people willing to listen, go for it, but don’t go with the dream that you’re going to be the darling of the festival and there’s going to be a bidding war. Banff isn’t Sundance.”

So, the ultimate answer of to Banff or not to Banff would seem to depend on your financial situation and expectations. Factor in registration discounts that can be had if your agent, for example, is a sponsor, in addition to shared hotel rooms and carpools. Consider whether you can count it as a tax write-off, or if you can earn the paid registration through one of the writer programs.

But maybe don’t sell a kidney to finance the trip in the expectation that you’ll get rich in the Rockies. ■

# Beyond the Banff

The Banff World Media Festival isn’t the only choice for do-it-yourself development.

- **Kidscreen Summit:** This is children’s writing team Shelley Hoffman and Robert Pincombe’s conference of choice for that genre.
- **inkdrinks:** Tassie Cameron calls virtual communities like Karen Walton’s [inkcanada](#) “a great place to meet people, ask questions and develop a creative support network — not just when you’re starting out, but throughout your career.” Inkdrinks happen regularly in Toronto and Vancouver, and, occasionally, in Montreal.
- **Toronto Screenwriters Conference:** Cameron pointed out this conference “gets some great guests and speakers, and there are lots of opportunities to meet like-minded writers there.”
- **Toronto International Film Festival:** This works “if you can get into the right parties, like eOne’s,” says Dennis Heaton.
- **Vancouver International Film Festival:** Heaton also says that “VIFF has a fairly well-attended industry market now.”
- **Writers Guild of Canada events:** Writers Talking TV, the WGC awards and holiday party, and similar events “all are fun, no-pressure events where you can be your most interesting self, meet people, and sometimes even learn something helpful about your craft,” says Cameron.

Adam Barken points out that pitching is frowned on at social events, and many free or low-cost networking opportunities are among writers rather than producers and network executives. “If you’re looking to meet them, that becomes trickier. The key is to get yourself an agent who can start getting you those meetings.” ■

# 2015 WGC SCREENWRITING AWARDS WINNERS

The WGC Congratulates the Winners of the  
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#### ANIMATION

*Fangbone*, Season 1 "The Warbrute of Friendship"

Written by **Simon Racioppa & Richard Elliott**

#### CHILDREN & YOUTH

*R.L. Stine's The Haunting Hour*, Season 4

"Mrs. Worthington"

Written by **Melody Fox**

#### DOCUMENTARY

*The Cholesterol Question*

Written by **Michael McNamara**

#### MOVIES & MINISERIES

*Elephant Song*

Written by **Nicolas Billon**

#### SHORTS & WEBSERIES

*Out With Dad*, Season 3 "Outed"

Written by **Jason Leaver**

#### TV COMEDY

*Mr. D*, Season 3 "Old School"

Written by **Andrew De Angelis**

#### TV DRAMA

*Orphan Black*, Season 2 "Ipsa Scientia Potestas Est"

Written by **Tony Elliott**

#### SPECIAL AWARDS

WGC Showrunner Award

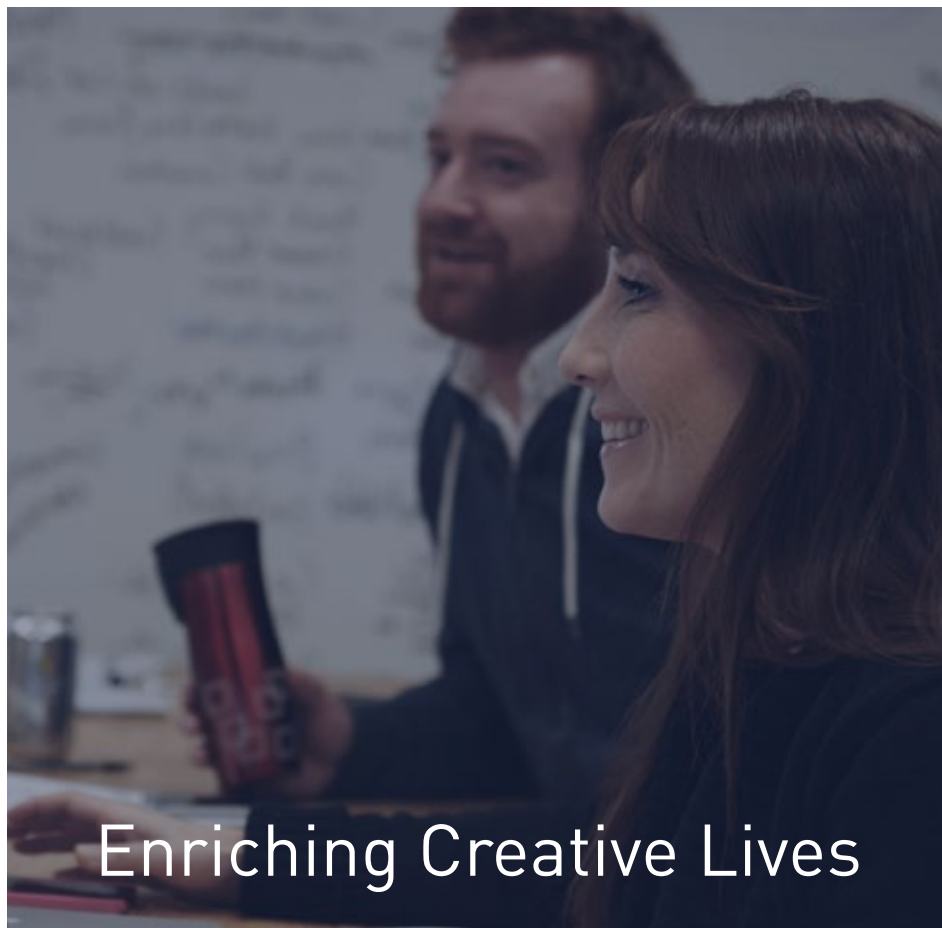
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**SIMON RACIOPPA — Animation**

*Fangbone!*, Season 1 “The Warbrute of Friendship”

Simon Racioppa is a Gemini Award-winning screenwriter/showrunner who writes and produces with partners such as Disney, Warner Brothers, Nickelodeon, Dreamworks, Cartoon Network, Temple Street Productions, The Jim Henson Company, Radical Sheep, Relativity, and Family Channel – working in animation, live action, and features, in Toronto and Los Angeles.



**RICHARD ELLIOTT — Animation**

*Fangbone!*, Season 1 “The Warbrute of Friendship”

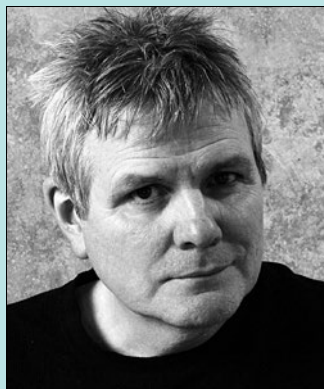
Richard Elliott is a Gemini Award-winning screenwriter and executive producer whose credits include Cartoon Network’s *Teen Titans*, story-editing Nickelodeon’s *Mr. Meaty*, Discovery Channel’s *Grossology*, Henson’s *Dark Crystal - Age of Rebellion*, Disney’s *Get Ed*, *Spliced*, and the upcoming *Fangbone!* Richard has written, developed, and produced projects for Disney, Warner Brothers, Dreamworks, BBC, IDW, Temple Street Productions, The Jim Henson Company, Passion Pictures, and Skybound.



**MELODY FOX — Children & Youth**

*R.L. Stine’s The Haunting Hour*, Season 4 “Mrs. Worthington”

Melody began her career writing for talking dragons, superheroes, and magical genies. No, she wasn’t hallucinating, she was working in animation. Among her credits are *Rugrats*, *Teen Titans*, and *Stuart Little*. Most recently she was on the writing staff of Syfy’s *Ascension* and CW’s *Reign*. She’s an Emmy and Humanitas nominee, and is especially proud of her work on *R.L. Stine’s The Haunting Hour*, where she’s written for the likes of aliens, ghosts and robots. Nope, still not hallucinating.



**MICHAEL MCNAMARA — Documentary**

*The Cholesterol Question*

Born in Chicago and raised in the U.S., England and Canada, Michael is an award-winning writer/director with series and feature-length documentary credits including: *Radio Revolution*; *100 Films & A Funeral*; and *Acquainted With the Night*. He wrote and directed *Ice Sweat & Tears* for CBC’s *Doc Zone* as well as *Lights Out* and *The Cholesterol Question* for CBC’s *Nature of Things*. He is currently writing a feature comedy adaptation of the novel *Heaven is Small*. McNamara also plays ukulele and collects scratchy vinyl musical recordings.



### **Nicolas Billon — Movies & Miniseries**

#### *Elephant Song*

Nicolas Billon's theatre work has been produced in Toronto, Stratford, New York, and Paris. His triptych *Fault Lines* garnered the 2013 Governor-General's Award for Drama. He recently adapted his first play, *The Elephant Song*, into a feature film starring Bruce Greenwood, Xavier Dolan, and Catherine Keener. Originally from Montreal, he now lives in Toronto with his partner Aislinn Rose.



### **JASON LEAVER — Shorts & Webseries**

#### *Out With Dad*, Season 3 "Outed"

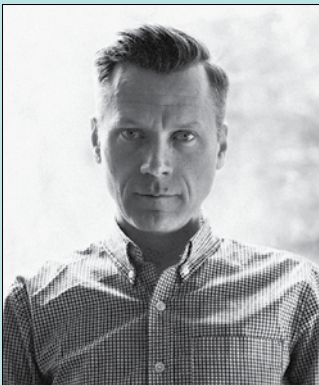
Jason is an award-winning filmmaker based in Toronto. His labour of love is the internationally acclaimed webseries *Out With Dad*, nominated twice in the Canadian Screen Awards. This heart-warming series has changed the lives of countless youth and their family and friends around the globe, and is the most watched Canadian-made webseries. Other webseries (director), include *Pete Winning and the Pirates*, *The Gate Series*, and select episodes of *Clutch*. He is currently in development on *Wandr*.



### **ANDREW DE ANGELIS — TV Comedy**

#### *Mr. D*, Season 3 "Old School"

Until recently, Andrew's only claim to fame was as a pioneer of childhood obesity. Not one to rest on his chubby laurels, Andrew enrolled in the CFC's Bell Media Prime Time TV program and went on to write for several Canadian shows such as *18 To Life*, *Little Mosque on the Prairie*, *Mr. D*, and the Teletoon at Night hit show, *Fugget About It*. He is currently in development on a comedy for Super Channel about a godawful Second Coming.



### **TONY ELLIOTT — TV Drama**

#### *Orphan Black*, Season 2 "Ipsa Scienti Potestas Est"

Tony is currently in L.A. writing on SyFy's new series *Hunters*. Previously, Tony wrote on seasons one and two of *Orphan Black*. In 2014, Tony made The Hollywood Tracking Board's *Young & Hungry List*; his spec thriller *Hiding Larry* was listed on The Hollywood Tracking Board's *Hit List*; and his short film *Entangled* premiered at TIFF. This summer, Tony will be directing his sci-fi feature spec *ARQ*, produced by Mason Novick (*Juno*). Tony lives in Los Angeles and Toronto.

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technical coordinators

production designers

art directors

first assistant art/set designers

second assistant art directors

third assistant art directors

art department coordinators

art department trainees

location managers

assistant location managers

trainee location managers

supervising picture editors

supervising sound editors

picture editors

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*The Cholesterol Question*

Written by Michael McNamara

### **SHORTS & WEBSERIES**

*Darknet "Episode 5"*

Written by Randall Cole

*Ruby Skye P.I.: The Maltese*

*Puppy "Everyone's a Suspect"*

Written by Jill Golick

### **TV COMEDY**

*This Hour Has 22 Minutes,*

Season XXI "Episode 16"

Written by Bob Kerr

### **TV DRAMA**

*Orphan Black, Season 2*

*"Ipsa Scientia Potestas Est"*

Written by Tony Elliott

*Strange Empire,*

Season 1 "The Oath"

Written by Jackie May

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## BRUCE SMITH

### The WGC Showrunner Award

Bruce Smith is the winner of the ninth WGC Showrunner Award, an acknowledgement of his impressive skills as a leader and a creative force. Bruce is currently the showrunner of the critically acclaimed *19-2*, and before that he was showrunner of CBC's *Cracked*. He has been a writer/producer on numerous dramas, such as *Durham County*, and has written MOWs and miniseries including *John A: Birth of a Country*, which won a 2013 Canadian Screen Award. Bruce has won three previous WGC Screenwriting Awards.

Writers working with Bruce know him to be indefatigable in pursuit of doing what's best for the show, so much so that one writer dubbed him "The Great Protector." He also creates a supportive environment in the writers' room to welcome ideas and voices other than his own, and writers learn and grow under his leadership.



## DENIS MCGRATH

### Writers Block Award

*For Service to Canadian Screenwriters*

Denis McGrath truly is deserving of this award, as the following partial tally of his service to screenwriters shows:

1/ WGC Executive Councillor (central region) since 2008. 2/ Chair of Canadian Screenwriter magazine's editorial board. 3/ Fierce negotiator during last two rounds of IPA bargaining. 4/ Screenwriters' advocate via all forms of social media; a voice of breaking news. 5/ Mentor to screenwriters. 6/ Ability to make us laugh ourselves silly.

As a screenwriter, his resume includes work on *X Company*, *Continuum*, *Bitten*, *Stargate Universe*, *Less Than Kind*, and *The Border*. He was nominated for a Gemini and won a WGC Screenwriting Award for his miniseries, *Across the River to Motor City*.

We salute him for the way he goes to bat ( cliché required, as Denis is a "baseball fan's baseball fan") for screenwriters — and hits it right out of the park.



## ALISON LEA BINGEMAN

### The Sondra Kelly Award

Alison Lea Bingeman is the recipient of the Sondra Kelly Award for her project, *Emily and Sophie*, a feature proposal about the friendship between artist Emily Carr and Sophie Frank, a Salish basket weaver.

The award honours the memory of Sondra Kelly, and 2015 marks its sixth year. Sondra served on the WGC council from 1997 to 2003 and was the first writer's voice on the Actra Fraternal Benefit Society board (1998-2003). The award money is put forward by the AFBS. In the latter part of Sondra's career she developed her own projects, and advocated for other female writers to do the same.

Alison has written on shows including *Remedy* and *Bomb Girls*. *Emily and Sophie* is a project she has been developing for a number of years, and one very close to her heart. The award will allow her to continue her research, and complete the script.





1. WGC Screenwriting Awards host Ryan Belleville
2. WGC Showrunner Award winner Bruce Smith with Christine van Moorsel
3. Sunnyside actor Patrice Goodman and co-showrunner Gary Pearson
4. WGC Councillor Dennis Heaton with Derek Schreyer and Thomas Pound
5. Richard Elliott and Simon Racioppa, winners of Animation
6. WGC President Jill Golick, Writers Block Award winner Denis McGrath, and WGC Executive Director Maureen Parker
7. Alison Lea Bingeman, Sondra Kelly Award winner, with Melody Fox, winner of Children & Youth







1. Saving Hope showrunner Adam Pettie with actor Wendy Crewson
2. Screenwriters Cal Coons and Greg Spottiswood
3. Michael McNamara, winner of Documentary
4. This Hour Has 22 Minutes writers Kevin Shustack, Sonya Bell, Jeremy Woodcock (co-writer of awards show), Abdul Butt, and Heidi Brander
5. X Company's Connor Price with Lucy Ellis, daughter of co-showrunners Stephanie Morgenstern and Mark Ellis, and season two story coordinator, Sydney Calvert
6. Nicolas Billon, winner of Movies & Miniseries, with Aislinn Rose and Andrew Pope
7. Nicole Demerse with awards committee chair Anne-Marie Perrotta and Deb Jarvis

feel like the whole world is crashing around me because of the pain  
 ing to keep the pain I just want to cry THE END OF  
 -ANV- I could not stand up I just want to cry THE END OF  
 feel abandoned alone MY ROPE AND HAVE  
 HERE TO TURN

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# WRITING FOR YOUTH

By Katherine Brodsky

Take a peek at a Canadian screenwriter's filmography, and you're likely to spot a youth-oriented credit somewhere in the mix. It's no accident; the genre offers vast opportunities and, so, for many TV writers, it is often their first job.

"As soon as I knew I wanted to be a TV writer, I knew I wanted to write about the high school experience," recalls Sarah Glinski, an Emmy-nominated writer, and showrunner on *Degrassi*. As a student at a smaller all-girls school, most of her own high school experience was lived vicariously through television, watching shows like *Beverly Hills 90210*, *Dawson's Creek*, and *Felicity*. After she graduated from the Canadian Film Centre, Glinski was determined to break into the genre and went to work writing youth-oriented specs and, well, knocking on doors.

"I knew I had to write for *Degrassi*," she recalls. "I kept knocking on their door until they finally said yes."

Although she's no longer a teen, the emotions of being a teen have not changed. "We still remember all our firsts," she explains. Whether it's that first kiss, love, fight, job, or heartbreak, we still carry it with us. These "firsts" make for exciting and meaningful television, she says.

For the rest Glinski goes deeper into the contemporary world of teens by reading young adult books, talking to teenagers who may be coping with issues that are being explored on the show and even 'shadowing' teens in the same way a teen might 'job shadow' an adult.

The key, says Glinski, is to remember that as a writer you're dealing with characters, not generic clichés of what a teenager might be like. "So, if you have really rich, interesting characters that are

representative of the teenagers that you see every day and you write from their point-of-view...once you know who they are, what their hopes and dreams are, what their families are like, what they want, what they like, and all of these things, [you can] write authentically."

For Glinski, *Degrassi* isn't so much a teen show, as it is a character-driven drama where the characters happen to be teens. And its setting — a high school — is a fascinating microcosm where just about anything can happen.

"I get to write rich, character-driven, issue-driven stories every day and that's the most amazing gift," she says.

These stories are also capable of making an impact. In some ways, the youth of today grew up in a darker world, says Glinski, describing a place where there's an increase in violence at schools, the looming presence of terrorism, and an unstable economy. Through *Degrassi*, she is able to address darker subjects that people are often afraid of discussing with teens. Unsurprisingly, for its exploration of matters such as suicide, transgender, and sexual assault, *Degrassi* has won many awards — but, more importantly, made a real difference to its viewers.

But, reminds Glinski, "the slice-of-life stories, the small comedic stories, I think those are just as important and I don't think you can have those big darker issues if you don't also have the fun and the joy and the optimism of high school."



*Clockwise from top left: Ramona Barckert, Frank van Keeken, Rachael Schaefer, Sarah Glinski.*

PHOTO OF RACHAEL SCHAEFER: RAMONA DIACONESCU;  
PHOTO OF RAMONA BARCKERT: STEPHEN SCOTT

Family Channel's teen comedy, *Wingin' It*, was Ramona Barckert's introduction to the teen genre. Soon after, she made the leap to seminal teen show, *Degrassi*, which in turn led to co-creating her own teen mystery show, *Open Heart*. There's no turning back. "I haven't really questioned it too much," she laughs.

"There's sometimes an attitude that it's not as good or a stepping stone in the industry," Barckert says, "but I really focus on the audience. It is so rewarding to write for an audience that just loves, loves, LOVES something, you know?"

Once a teen or tween audience latches onto something, "it is so loyal and cares so much — you can actually change people's lives," she says.

Like Glinski, she believes in staying current with movies, pop culture, and music that teens like. "When you know you're writing to that audience, you have to go where they are," she says, "You have to put your life in the world that they are living in." That means spending time on social media — a place that offers a real glimpse into their unfiltered selves — and observing how they communicate with each other. "You can creep without being too creepy," Barckert says with a laugh. "They are putting it out there, so it's there for everyone to see; they are very open with who they are online."

What interests teen audiences isn't so different than what interests any audience — but relationships, whether of the romance or friendship variety, hook them in, along with strong, original characters.

"I don't think their mindset is any different than an adult's," agrees Frank van Keeken, creator of *The Next Step*, a popular Family Channel show centered on the lives of a group of competitive dancers. "I think it's always the same thing. The things they crave,

think about, and ache for are basically identical; they just don't necessarily have the same depth of experience."

When you're young, you still think about death, mortality, life and your circumstances, explains van Keeken. "It's a disservice to sort of say it's children's writing for children...you think about all the things you think about for the rest of your life, you just don't necessarily have the same experience to make it overly neurotic. It's a much purer inclination and, in that sense, it's a much cleaner story."

What they want is to see a representation of themselves, says Barckert. It's about never feeling alone: "There's always someone on screen that feels the way I feel, or looks the way I look, and feels awkward and weird the way I am. It makes us feel less alone."

Being a teenager or tween means being at the most vulnerable point in their lives — they haven't quite figured it all out yet. "When they watch it on TV they feel that at least they are not alone, they have this — it feels comforting."

So even a show about a werewolf or vampire can be about the very real issue of being an outsider. "A werewolf isn't normal and [when] you put him on screen, someone will go, 'I feel that way too,'" explains Barckert.

"It hits you in a different part of your heart," she says. "When you're a kid, you're trying to sort the world watching that stuff."

Since *The Next Step* employs dancers instead of actors, unlike traditional scripted shows such as *Degrassi* or *Open Heart*, the show's writers prepare very detailed outlines, walk the actors through the scenes, and don't bother with the dialogue. "We just let everyone in the scene do the dialogue the way they would do it," says van Keeken. "[It] makes writing to the character much easier."

It was a system borne out of necessity given that *The Next Step* shoots a new episode nearly every day, making it impossible for cast members to memorize that much text. But, given the authentic performances it has resulted in, van Keeken might never go back to writing full dialogue. "I always think it's so woefully inadequate compared to what the performers come up with."

Rachael Schaefer, a long-time writer/producer on the show, agrees: "It gives it a more authentic feel. The kids bring their own [language] that you couldn't really get from adult writers — they have their own way of talking."

On its third season, *The Next Step*, which, at its core, focuses on tribal belonging, has enjoyed incredible success around the world, with a spinoff, *The Music Room*, about finding your true voice, on the

"It is so rewarding to write for an audience that just loves, loves, LOVES something, you know?"

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“Being a good writer, you should be able to write about anything. Whatever the show is, you have to find a way to help that show, so if you can figure out a story that works for a 12-year-old, you’ll be in good standing to write for any show.”

way. Van Keeken can’t pinpoint the exact reason for the show’s success except that “we try to write stories that they would care about — that anyone would care about.” And while much tween television might try to cure bullying in a single episode, *The Next Step* isn’t about offering easy answers. “We make no pretense that we could ever do that; we are more interested in the process.”

Too often, says Schaefer, people trivialize children’s television as something dumbed down and lacking real drama. “I always operated under the assumption that a good story is a good story no matter who you’re writing for,” she says.

Despite a limitation on what you can put on the screen for a younger audience, you can create interesting and dynamic characters that have a true impact on their audience regardless of age group. Instead of stereotyping characters as a ditz, jock, or popular girl, *The Next Step* strives to give the characters dimensions.

“You can’t hide behind artifice,” says van Keeken. That means no exploding cars or salacious material. “I really have to think about what the story is — I became a better writer working in children’s television because I have to think about what is the story.”

Schaefer recalls her experiences with a character named “Emily” in the first season of *The Next Step*. At first, Emily appeared to be merely a mean bully, causing some concern among parents. But van Keeken insisted on giving it time. By the second part of the season, the audience discovered that Emily was actually not as strong a dancer as the others and was feeling threatened. Her bullying was the result of her insecurity. “I think it’s very important for kids to see that people aren’t just mean for the sake of being mean,

there’s really something underlying,” says Schaefer.

Having grown up with *Saved by the Bell*, *Full House*, and *90210*, Schaefer recognizes the lasting impact these shows can have on a younger audience. “The experiences that you have at that age stay with you forever, so there’s something really nice about being able to tap back into that,” she admits. “Audiences in that age group are so passionate and they love it so much — you don’t get that as much with adult audiences.”

Although he’s had some strong hits in the genre, van Keeken wasn’t looking to write specifically for youth — it was happenstance. Having moved back to Canada from L.A., an agent told him that Disney was looking for a show. He had an idea; it was *Wingin’ It*. Alas, Disney’s offer was too low and the concept languished in a drawer. After doing another series for Temple Street Productions, van Keeken was asked if he had any other shows on the go. As it happens, he did. *Wingin’ It* ended up running for 51 episodes on Family Channel and became the predecessor to *The Next Step*. “It was serendipity. I think most things are.”

“Being a good writer, you should be able to write about anything,” he insists. “Whatever the show is, you have to find a way to help that show, so if you can figure out a story that works for a 12-year-old, you’ll be in good standing to write for any show.”

As for advice? “Get good!” laughs Glinski, adding, “watch a lot of teen TV, write some specs you’re proud of and go knock on people’s doors.” But, she says, don’t forget a crucial ingredient: Have a passion for writing for teenagers. “You need to love it and to have it be really part of you to do a good job — and that can probably be applied to any kind of writing.” ■

# CANCOMEDY

By Mark Dillon

We've got the writing talent, so why are there so few Canadian TV comedy hits?



Take a bow, Canada. You're a scream.

We've been laughing with ourselves since the dawn of TV. From *The Wayne and Shuster Hour* to *SCTV*, *The Kids in the Hall*, *Royal Canadian Air Farce*, *Corner Gas* and many others, there is a golden history of Canuck yuks. And let's not forget that *Saturday Night Live* was created by a Canadian and that many U.S. sitcoms have been run by Canadian writers and featured Canadian stars.

But despite that legacy, this feels like a fallow period for homegrown comedy, particularly among the private broadcasters. As of April, Bell Media, which gave us *Corner Gas* and owns The Comedy Network, did not have a Canadian comedy series on air or in production.

It had *Spun Out*, the multi-cam sitcom starring Kid in the Hall Dave Foley, which it had renewed after it averaged a reported 645,000 viewers in its first season. A preview episode was to air in a coveted post-Super Bowl slot, but the series was abruptly cancelled in January after actor J.P. Manoux was arrested on charges of voyeurism.

Bell has new seasons of the stand-up collection *Just for Laughs: All Access* and dark comedy *Sensitive Skin* (an adaptation of the British series of the same name) on the way, and has green-lit the web-to-TV series *Letterkenny*.

Shaw Media, likewise, has no original comedies on air. It is directing efforts online with weekly sketches for *The Second City Project* at GlobalTV.com, with a broadcast special having been slated to air in April.

Rogers Media's City has been more active, but has had a difficult time finding audiences for local

laughers. It cancelled *Package Deal* in March after the multi-cam sitcom averaged 132,600 2+ AMA viewers (total number of viewers two and older watching a show, as set out by Nielsen, "calculated per minute during a specified period of time over the program duration") over 20 episodes (source: Numeris). It ordered a back half of season one episodes for sketch series *Sunnyside*, but average ratings for the first six episodes were a precariously low 112,400.

Single-camera comedy *Young Drunk Punk*, created by Kid in the Hall Bruce McCulloch, has done somewhat better on City, averaging 177,300 over eight episodes, and will reach more viewers when it airs on CBC in the fall as part of a program swap that will also see CBC's scripted *Mr. D* air on City.

Canadians have never stopped tuning into the CBC for a chuckle. Tuesday nights recently have seen a venerable lineup that includes Newfoundlanders riffing on the news with *Rick Mercer Report* (12 seasons; averaging 861,000 viewers this season) and *This Hour Has 22 Minutes* (22 seasons; 715,000 viewers), followed by *Schitt's Creek* (nearly 1.1 million in its first season) and *Mr. D* (four seasons; 561,000 viewers). When *Schitt's Creek* went on hiatus after season one, it was replaced by the 12th season of *Just for Laughs Gags*.

Mark Critch, star and writer on *22 Minutes*, believes his show has succeeded for so long with "wigs and Prime Minister jokes" because it is "unapologetically Canadian," rather than mimicking American formats or styles.



From left: Bruce McCulloch, Gary Pearson, Sarah Fowlie, Jared Keeso.

“Canadian writers and networks make big mistakes when they get caught up in competing with the U.S. and trying to make a show for the sole purpose of selling it,” Critch says. “These sitcoms will bring in a Canadian star who’s made it in the States, but just because he or she was born here doesn’t mean Canadians relate to them. More Canadians will tune in to see Justin Trudeau on our show than Pam Anderson on *Package Deal*.”

Critch stepped out of his usual sketch/variety box to pen and perform in CTV’s scripted comedy *Satisfaction*, which was cancelled in 2013 after averaging 511,000 viewers in its first season.

“I remember we had those discussions: ‘We really want to sell to the States, and we don’t want too many Canadian references.’ I argued there should be some and [creator] Tim McAuliffe fought to get some things in there to make it ‘Canadian.’ *Corner Gas* worked here because it was somebody talking about their experience. It was regional but could play anywhere in Canada,” Critch says.

Gary Pearson, a veteran of the sketch, improv and scripted worlds, who co-created *Sunnyside* with Dan Redican, is all for trying the American multi-cam model here. Unfortunately, his show happens to be scheduled at 8 p.m. on Thursdays against CTV’s U.S. multi-cam juggernaut, *The Big Bang Theory*.

“Just because we’re Canadian doesn’t mean we can’t do multi-cam just as well,” he says. “But what the U.S. has that we don’t is critical mass, where they put out dozens of pilots every year and pick their top ones, and even in those there’s

attrition. There might have been 40 different shows to come up with one hit.”

Homegrown drama, meanwhile, has undergone a renaissance that started with *Flashpoint*, as series picked up strong numbers at home, and broadcast partners in the U.S.; Canadian comedy, not so much.

“A lot of people watch shows like *Flashpoint*,” says *Young Drunk Punk*’s Bruce McCulloch. “They’re not that specific or groundbreaking. With comedy, the stuff that cuts through is groundbreaking or fresh in some way. Like *Call Me Fitz*—weird and fresh.”

He adds that half-hour running times add another layer of difficulty for network programmers. “When I develop a show, the broadcaster always says, ‘What am I going to pair this with?’ And I answer, ‘I don’t know. You tell me.’ It’s harder for comedies to stand alone.” In the spring, *Young Drunk Punk* followed U.S. single-camera sitcom *The Middle*, starring Patricia Heaton, Wednesdays at 8:30 p.m. on City.

CBC has also announced more programming around the Halifax and Winnipeg Just for Laughs comedy festivals and another stab at the single-camera *Michael: Tuesdays & Thursdays*, which was cancelled after its 2011 run amid poor ratings. New on the sked is the half-hour series adaptation of *Kim’s Convenience*, Ins Choi’s popular play set in a Korean-owned Toronto convenience store, and *Baroness Von Sketch Show*, which CBC calls a “subversive, all-female ensemble that features some of Canada’s best sketch comedians as they take



From left: Michelle Daly, Mark Critch, Eugene and Dan Levy.



aim right down the barrel of contemporary social trends, targeting passive-aggressive parenting, hipster culture and office politics.”

Returning are *Mr. D* starring Gerry Dee and the scripted *Schitt's Creek*, the dry riches-to-rags comedy co-created by stars Daniel Levy and his father, Eugene Levy, that also airs in the U.S. on the Pop channel. The additional presence of performers Catherine O'Hara and American comedian Chris Elliott no doubt helped the show's stateside saleability.

Michelle Daly, senior director of CBC comedy, acknowledges that foreign broadcast partners are always a consideration.

“It's so hard to make television here in Canada,” she says. “You have to think of unique partnerships going forward. As a public broadcaster, it has to be reflective of here and feel like here, and if that can travel, that's great. But if minor tweaks and changes would open it up to have another partner in, it behooves us to look at that.”

But getting that foreign partner isn't always possible because “comedy doesn't travel that well,” according to Sarah Fowlie, Bell Media's director of independent production, comedy. “*Corner Gas* is a crazy performing juggernaut here, but it didn't really break into the American audience.”

*Schitt's Creek* is the only Canadian comedy that regularly brought in more than one million viewers this past season, as *Corner Gas* did throughout its 2004-2009 run. Regarding the inability for other shows to achieve that milestone, Fowlie says, “Comedy in general is insanely subjective. It's easier to make someone cry than laugh.”

Traditional TV is a gamble more than ever with so much competition in the digital space, but the upside is that the Internet has given aspiring comedy writers an immediate international platform from which to build interest in projects.

Such is the case with *Letterkenny*, which began as five foul-mouthed 90-120 second YouTube webisodes mocking small-town Ontario life that garnered more than eight million views. Bell Media has approved a half-hour adaptation for its CraveTV SVOD service, with broadcast likely to follow on Comedy. The show is the brainchild of Canadian Screen Award-winning actor Jared Keeso (19-2), who is co-writing with Jacob Tierney.

“You throw s\*\*\* on the wall on YouTube and see what sticks,” Keeso says. “I had no idea *Letterkenny Problems* would catch on with people in Minnesota and North Dakota, who are saying, ‘This could be here.’ Everybody knows somebody from a *Letterkenny*. Our YouTube demographics show we're almost as popular in the States as in Canada. We submitted those stats about our audience to the network and that helped us get the deal.”

Creators' ability to more easily get content in front of the public and prove its marketability gives one hope. *Sunnyside's* Pearson would point the private broadcasters to the CBC's four-Cancomedy block on Tuesday nights.

“I'd love to see that on all the networks,” he says. “I want to see our business grow. I see a lot of really good young writers and performers across the country and I just want them to have a place to make a living.” ■

# SCRIPTED VS. SKETCH VS. IMPROV

Canadians have chops in various forms of TV comedy, whether working from a half-hour script, producing vignettes or plain old wingin' it. Sometimes, the genres of scripted, sketch and improv commingle—with side-splitting results.

*Canadian Screenwriter* asked the creators or co-creators of three fresh and very different comedies about how they turn ideas into belly laughs: Daniel Levy of the scripted *Schitt's Creek*, in which he stars; Bruce McCulloch of *Young Drunk Punk*, which is scripted with some improv, and in which he stars; and Gary Pearson of sketch show *Sunnyside*.

**Canadian Screenwriter:** *How do your writers collaborate?*

**Daniel Levy:** We throw up ideas on a board, then order them in terms of which could work and where they'd go in the season. In addition to our overarching story and character goals, we puzzle-piece and hope everything fits together.

**Bruce McCulloch:** The writers might have a couple of ideas, but we can get there as a group. Sometimes, I'll say, "You guys pair up and write three paragraphs and we'll read it to each other." I believe in small projects in the creation of episodes.

**Gary Pearson:** We pitch and kick things around until an idea sticks. Ideas can be precious and delicate, and if a writer has one but doesn't feel like talking about it yet, we'll say, "Write it and we'll read it and see what we think."

**CS:** *How does improv factor into the process?*

**DL:** There's a foundation of scripted dialogue, but we allow for some workshopping when we get scenes on their feet on the floor. Usually, there are some changes and tweaks in terms of the actors being able to do it how they want.

**BM:** I come from sketch, and what I love about sketch is: "What do you got?" "A guy steals a bank machine. Anything in that?" You don't know where it's going to go, but if there's a good idea, everyone knows it and they just go in that direction.

**GP:** People improvise a little in the room and pretend they're a character. We also read scripts out loud a lot. We shoot on location and don't have much time, so we get what's in the script first, and if there's time, we'll fool around.

**CS:** *Do performers make better comedy writers?*

**DL:** In my case, yes, because I have an idea of who my character is and I intrinsically know where he can or can't go and have been able to steer that direction. My dad [Eugene Levy] has the same sense of his character.

**BM:** Performers know it's not all about words. Sometimes writers who haven't been performers may think the words can save them. But the funniest part of a scene is usually just a guy going "Huh?" It's not your witty line.

**GP:** I did hundreds of live shows with sketch troupe The Chumps, and that laughter or lack of laughter stays with you forever. For writers or performers, it's important early on to constantly expose your material to audiences. ■

# How Will You Leave Your Audience?

By Jim Henshaw



John on the set of *The Midday Sun in Zimbabwe*

“How will you leave your audience?” That was the fundamental question John Hunter, who passed away peacefully on February 2, 2015, asked of those he mentored and posed to himself during four decades of produced screenplays.

Primary among his dramatic skills was an awareness that the emotions felt or gained by those viewing his work was what the work was all about.

John sold his first screenplay, *Black Phoenix*, to the CBC in 1969, while producing CTV’s popular *Carl Smith’s Country Music Hall*, a series that inspired his first feature, *The Hard Part Begins*, in 1974.

He would go on to write or produce several iconic features and TV movies, including *Blood & Guts*, *The Boy Next Door*, *Giant Mine*, *John and the Missus* as well as the internationally acclaimed *The Grey Fox*.

John’s resume also includes dozens of series titles and the uncredited rewrites of successful films. But a greater measure of who he was can be found in the words of those he encountered while compiling those credits.

“When John Hunter received the Best Original Screenplay Genie for *The Grey Fox*, he said, “I just want to thank Phillip Borsos for directing my screenplay, and the actors for performing my lines.” Then, he walked

off without another word. It was perfect John Hunter: clear, elegant and distilled to the essentials.”

- Peter O’Brian, producer, *The Grey Fox*

“As a story editor on *Dead Man’s Gun*, I got to know John’s writing well. He was meticulous, a get-it-done kind of writer. He had a feel for the classic western, understood its stark poetry. He also understood the collaborative nature of TV, and, far as I know, never held it against me.”

- Martin Kinch, *Dead Man’s Gun*

“John was humble in the way that people who know what they are doing are humble. Hanging around him was like being with the older kids in a tough neighborhood: he told you the truth, looked out for you and made you feel like you belonged.”

- Gary Fisher, writer, *Curtains for Roy*

“From John you got the full existential view of life. It set him apart from other writers. They didn’t have the past history that drove him to write.”

- Paul Lynch, director, *The Hard Part Begins*

“He attended a play I’d written, and introduced himself with, ‘You write great dialogue. The problem is you write too much of it.’ He was an image-based guy fully motivated by story logic. A great teacher and a wonderful friend.”

- Aaron Bushkowsky, playwright and screenwriter, *Hungry Hills*

“He always had time. He was un-illusioned, direct, right. One of Canada’s finest screenwriters. Maybe the best one.”

- Beret Borsos, widow of Phillip Borsos.

John Hunter produced my own first feature, *A Sweeter Song*. But of more importance, he taught me the essential characteristics of a professional writer: creative courage, resilience, and treating those surrounding you with respect and dignity. In art and life the question is the same — “How will you leave your audience?” ■



# Courting the writer inside

By Dani Ng-See-Quan

**Y**ou could argue that a career shift from a lawyer to a screenwriter isn't an obvious move. But screenwriter Joseph Kay shifted from drafting legal briefs for the courtroom to tapping creative briefs for the writers' room. His enduring interest in the law is evident in his projects: he has written for *This is Wonderland*, *Living in Your Car* and a handful of episodes of *Republic of Doyle*. Up next, he's showrunning the English-language adaptation of Radio-Canada's *Nouvelle Adresse* for CBC.

***You probably get this question a lot: How did you go from being a transactional lawyer on Bay Street to a screenwriter?***

I liked law school a lot — the academic side of it — but I didn't like the practising of law. I knew that I wanted to write. I wrote a spec and got into the CFC (Canadian Film Centre) for the prime-time TV program, so I up and quit my job as a lawyer and went back to the CFC.

***Did you always write or was there a specific instance that inspired you to make the change?***

I started to write while I was working as a lawyer. It took me a period of months to convince myself to quit and to try it. I did it totally recreationally and I

actually wrote a short film that got made.

***How does your past life as a lawyer inspire your writing?***

The most valuable thing you get out of law school, which is something that you can apply to life, is that the one thing they really teach you to do is to approach something that's very complicated that you don't know the first thing about, and figure out how to do that thing. I recommend going to law school recreationally for everybody (laughter).

***You were a story editor for This is Wonderland, but also wrote for the show. Did one help the other?***

I think it's really important to do all aspects of the job — to be the super junior who's just learning and listening. The more senior you get, the more understanding you have of the different pieces. What's cool in Canada, too, is that you know that even though there tends to be a hierarchy in the way these jobs are structured, there's openness to breaking through that hierarchy.

***What are the key elements for a great writers' room?***

Nice people who are collaborative and open. That's it. You have to be with [your colleagues] a lot — 12 hours a day — and you're

in a very vulnerable position, because you're saying and writing things that are constantly being evaluated and reevaluated. The people that I like working with are nice people who understand that, at some point, recognize that one person's success is everyone's success.

***What are you working on now and what's next?***

I'm working on a new show for CBC called *New Address*, an adaptation of the French-language Radio-Canada show. It's a family drama that I am showrunning, and we start filming in June in Montreal.

***How has your experience been writing an adaptation versus writing something brand new?***

It's different; it's great — fantastic actually. We're changing the show because why would you make the same show in two different languages? But the creator of *Nouvelle Adresse* has created characters that are amazing. It's really exciting — these characters have existed for three seasons somewhere else, so (in working through the adaptation), you're able to see where they went, you know how certain things worked, and you have access to the person who saw all that through. It's kind of like writing the second season of something, but starting fresh. ■

# 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](http://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](mailto: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.*



# When no idea is too weird

By Cameron Archer

**A**s an improvisational comedian, Jan Caruana has won Toronto Fringe Festival Best of Fringe and multiple Canadian Comedy Awards for solo and troupe work. Caruana transitioned to screenwriting, writing for the YTV sketch comedy show *That's So Weird!* in various capacities during its three-season run. In 2013, *That's So Weird!* earned a Canadian Screen Award nomination for best writing in a variety or sketch program or series. Caruana is head writer for *Sunnyside*, a Counterfeit Pictures/Buffalo Gal Pictures sketch-com which debuted on City in 2015.

## ***How did you enter television screenwriting?***

I got my first job as a screenwriter when Gary Pearson was seeing a lot of live comedy, casting a new sketch show for young audiences. I was too old to be in the show, as he told me numerous times in our first meeting, but (he) appreciated what I was doing on stage. Coming from an improv background himself, he asked me to submit a package.

## ***How difficult was the transition from improv to a structured form of writing? How does improv study inform your current work on Sunnyside?***

The transition from improv to writing was a relatively smooth

one. Improvising is writing on the fly; character, emotional stakes and narrative are always top of mind. The difference for me is the economy of writing — rewriting and honing until you can get the story and the jokes out as precisely as possible. Improv continues to inform my writing. It is important for me to keep that sense of play. For *Sunnyside* in particular, knowing that no idea is too weird, it is nice to not block yourself from developing an idea — “yes-anding” your own offer, to use a ding-dong improv phrase.

## ***What advantages are there in being a writer/performer?***

For me, being able to hear the dialogue in my head [and] knowing the way I might perform helps me. Having so much stage experience, I have an idea about what will work with an audience or how far I can push a joke.

One of the great things about *Sunnyside* is everyone has years of stage experience behind them. The reads really come alive, which gives everything you write a fighting chance.

## ***What is the biggest challenge in your writing career and how is that challenge met?***

Aside from the crippling and constant self-doubt? I suppose it is just getting the work. Getting your

face and your name out there can be hard when there are so many great people already established. I try to meet the challenge by working hard and learning as much as I possibly can from every experience. I'm very lucky to be writing with people like Gary Pearson, Dan Redican, Kathleen Phillips and Alastair Forbes every day.

## ***Where do you see Canadian sketch comedy going in the future? Will digital media drive the majority of the content or will it assume the TV/digital hybrid model favoured by shows like Sunnyside?***

I hope that sketch comedy (and comedy, in general) continues the trajectory it has been on in the last little while. I grew up on SCTV reruns and *Kids in the Hall*. With our show and an all-female sketch show (*Baroness von Sketch Show*) in development at CBC, the *Second City* special...it's a very exciting time. I would hope that we can keep up the grand old tradition of Canadian sketch comedy.

I think digital media will drive a lot of what we see in sketch. There is so much fantastic stuff online and so many talented people who now have the means and the medium to make terrific content, but there's something nice about coming home and turning on your TV set, isn't there? ■

# News from WGC Members

**Michael MacLennan** is delighted that the first season of *New Address*, a drama he developed for CBC, goes into production in Montreal this summer. Meanwhile, he's recently joined the third season of ABC Family's *The Fosters*, as co-executive producer.

**Jennica Harper** recently co-executive produced season two of *Some Assembly Required* (YTV/Netflix), wrote a freelance episode of the new procedural *Ties That Bind* (UP), and had a baby (who, frankly, doesn't appreciate being last in this list).

**Alex Epstein** gave a talk at the East Coast Game Conference in Raleigh, N.C. on "Bad Boys: Characters With Flaws are More Fun." In videogames, this is considered controversial.

**Aron Dunn** joined *Justin Time's* (Guru Studios/Disney Jr./Netflix) writing team, moderated an animation session at the Toronto Screenwriting Conference and recently pitched Teletoon and DHX Television.

**Cheryl Foggo's** documentary film about legendary black cowboy John Ware is now in development with the NFB. Foggo received the 2013 Sondra Kelly Award from the WGC in support of this project. In addition, her stage play, *John Ware Reimagined*, has been shortlisted for the 2015 Writers' Guild of Alberta Gwen Pharis Ringwood Award for Drama.

**Ian Carpenter** is loving writing for *Blackstone*, the pilot of *Good Cop Bad Cop* (nothing to do with the feature), features *Crashed Hopes*, for Incendo and TMN/HBO, and a co-write on *Stoker's Furnace*.

**Carolyn Saunders'** dark comedy feature, *Drilled*, will shoot this fall, with Jason Priestley directing. This summer, Carolyn directs another film she wrote, the psychological thriller *The Wasting*, starring Alexz Johnson and Raven Adamson.

*Home Sweet Hell*, co-written by **Ted Elrick** and starring Katherine Heigl, Patrick Wilson, Jordana Brewster and Jim Belushi, was released on DVD and BluRay in April.

Writer/director **Mina Shum** recently completed her first documentary, *Ninth Floor*, for the NFB. Shum also received Canada Council and B.C. Arts Council production funds for her feature script, *Meditation Park*.

**Emma Campbell** is a story editor on *The Music Room*, Frank van Keeken's spinoff from his hit series, *The Next Step*.

**Will Pascoe** is currently writing the pilot for a new series for A+E Studios and developing his conspiracy drama series for producer Gary Randall and Boardwalk Entertainment.

**Mark Purdy** just finished working as a story editor on the DHX

musical comedy series, *Make It Pop*, for Nickelodeon and YTV. Also, some segments he wrote for *Sesame Street* have aired on PBS.

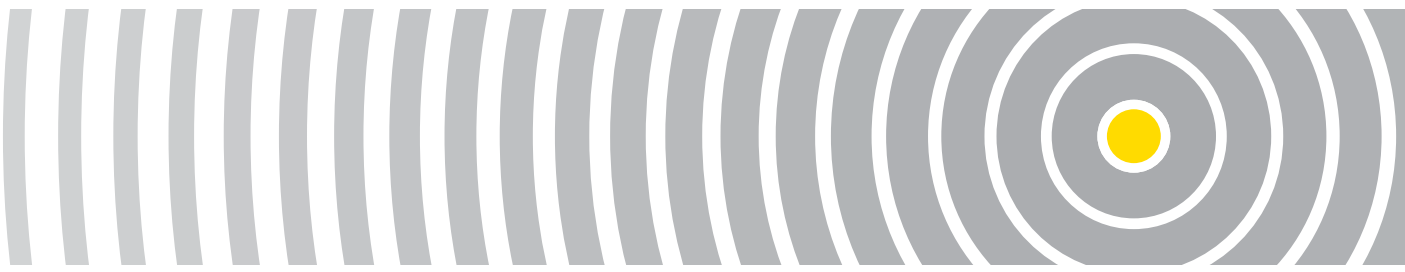
**Bill Taub** will be at San Diego's Comic-Con in July on a panel devoted to pilots and webseries, discussing his book *Automatic Pilot*. He will also be teaching his online UCLA workshop, *Creating a Web Series*, again this summer.

**Robert Cohen** has been directing network sitcoms including *Fresh Off The Boat* on ABC, and *Weird Loners* on Fox. He also directed a third season on IFC's *Maron*. Robert's first feature documentary, *Being Canadian*, had its world premiere at Hot Docs in April.

**Miklos Perlus** is writing and co-executive producing season two of the live action preschool drama, *Hi Opie* (TVO), with Kate Barris, Larry Mirkin, and marbledmedia.

If you can't beat 'em, join 'em. That's the thinking behind The Company of Writers, a production company formed by WGC members **Conni Massing**, **Scot Morison** and **Curtis Gillespie**. The trio are open for business and welcome visits from 'fellow travelers.' Contact: 780-993-5920.

**Claire Ross Dunn** was most recently a writer and supervising producer on DHX's new half-hour tween musical comedy, *Make it Pop*. The show, created by Thomas W. Lynch and Nick Cannon, airs on Nickelodeon and YTV.



**Chris Tolley** is about to shoot a short film written with **Laura Mullin**. The screenplay, *Awake*, is based on their play of the same name, which received much critical and box-office success. Tolley is also running for Parliament in the upcoming federal election.

**Keith Ross Leckie** is very happy to announce that Breakthrough Entertainment and Buffalo Gals are collaborating to produce a feature version of his novel *Coppermine*. Leckie will pen the script.

**Willem Wennekers** is showrunning season three of the animated hit, *Fugget About It*.

**J.D. (Dan) Smith** has been hired by KRU/Kartun Animation Malaysia to develop and write a feature-length screenplay for the CG animated production tentatively titled *Monkey Business*.

**Nile Séguin** is working as a story consultant on the Frantic Films' series *Still Standing* (formerly *Of All Places*).

**Tom Mason** continues writing on a new series for Spinmaster, while developing an action comedy series for Homeplate Entertainment. In his spare time, he's working on a comic book project and arguing on Facebook with people who are wrong because, why not?

**Donald Martin** has been commissioned to write the

feature, *Defiant Requiem*, about conductor Rafael Schachter, who dared to stage Verdi's *Requiem Mass for the Dead* for the Nazi High Command with fellow inmates at the Terezin labour camp in Second World War.

**David Schmidt** is earning his splinters as the supervising story editor on season three of *Timber Kings* for HGTV.

**Kevin Shustack** is a writer for CBC's *This Hour Has 22 Minutes* and is currently writing on the first season of *ToonMart Marty* for Sardine Productions and Teletoon.

**Fran Handman/Sheldon Gartner's** family musical, *A Magical Goose Called Sam*, received a Jerry Kaufman developmental cash award in April at the Dramatists Guild in New York City. The duo's *Adding Machine, the Musical*, has been selected for presentation in the Thespis Theatre Festival at the Hudson Guild in New York City.

**Alan Silberberg's** middle-grade novel, *The Awesome Almost 100% True Adventures of Matt & Craz* (Simon & Schuster), has been optioned by Nickelodeon, and Silberberg has written the script for the original TV movie.

**PJ Reece** has released the eBook *Story Structure Expedition: Journey to the Heart of a Story*. Reece calls this an "entertainment for writers,"

although one reviewer has said, "This is commentary on fiction like we've never seen it before." Another called it "a mind-bending whiplash journey to the heart of how and why writers write memorable stories."

**Peter Behrens** will be a fellow at Harvard University's Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study in 2015-16. His next novel, *KARIN*, comes out in spring 2016 from House of Anansi (Canada) and Pantheon (U.S.).

**Stacy Gardner's** piece, *A Letter to My Grandmother*, is published in the fourth anthology of *Women Writing Letters*, by Gailey Road Productions April 2015.

Writing duo **Josh Sager and Jerome Simpson** opened a Writing Shop. Their menu includes scripts, diary entries, Dear John letters, epitaphs, bathroom stall graffiti, bibliographies, instruction manuals and long-form epic poetry. Visit before noon and receive a free Grammar Upgrade!

**Pablo F. Fenjves** sold his action comedy, *Mother*, to Universal Pictures. Halle Berry is attached to star. Fenjves is also writing a dramatic feature for Treehouse Pictures, and a TV pilot about tabloid journalism for Lakeshore Entertainment. Another project, *The Good Sister*, produced last year by Incendo and shot entirely in Montreal, was just nominated for a Rockie Award. ■

## Welcome

**Sheryl J. Anderson** Westchester CA  
**Kevin Barnes** Toronto ON  
**Scott Bennie** Calgary AB  
**Michael Caldwell** Mercer Island WA  
**Jonathan Callan** North Hollywood CA  
**Calum deHartog** Toronto ON  
**Ari Eisner** Studio City CA  
**Kervin Faria** Whitby ON  
**Michael T. Foley** Toronto ON  
**Nicholas Kinsey** Quebec QC  
**Christine Lavaf** Sherman Oaks CA  
**Amanda Joy Lim** Willowdale ON  
**Matthew MacFadzean** Toronto ON  
**Kyle Marshall** Ottawa ON

**John McKinnon** Ottawa ON  
**Craig Mitchell** Los Angeles CA  
**Kevin Murphy** Los Angeles CA  
**Toby Osborne** Perth ON  
**Amy Palmer Robertson** Los Angeles CA  
**Nelofer Pazira** Toronto ON  
**Laura Seaton** Toronto ON  
**Joelle Sellner** Los Angeles CA  
**Julie Stewart** West Vancouver BC  
**Scott Stewart** West Vancouver BC  
**Anthony Teles** Toronto ON  
**Samantha Wan** Alliston ON  
**Dan Lee West** Los Angeles CA

## Our condolences

**John Hunter** Toronto ON  
**William Langstroth**  
**Jack McAndrew** Cornwall PE

**Barry Morgan** Mississauga ON  
**Patricia Ann Watson** Toronto ON

### Make SPACE for POSITIVE CHANGE

At times, the rigors, criticism and rejection we face from our work can become too much.

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Psychotherapist, BA, CTP Dipl.  
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[www.wgc.ca](http://www.wgc.ca)

## 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's soon-to-be-released coming-of-age drama, I Love You, Lefty is the inspirational story of a teenage lumberjack who overcomes adversity after losing his right hand — and his first love — in a terrible logging accident. The film is considered by Gordonson to be his seminal work. He refuses to take credit for inventing the colour orange, but will reluctantly admit that he was instrumental in making it “relevant.” He solves problems.*

**Oh, Great Scribe: We're about to shoot the pilot episode for my first series, a romantic comedy about a bride who falls in love with her fiancé's best man. Here's the problem, I just found out at the production meeting that the director has completely rewritten my script with the blessing of my executive producer! When I complained to my executive producer, he told me “the concept is essentially the same, the director has just made it more cinematic.” But the last time I checked, romantic comedies didn't have laser beam shoot-outs in space. I thought TV was the writer's medium?**

A: Oh, Richard... can I call you Richard? I'm going to call you Richard. Richard, all I can say to you is “welcome to the world of cinematic television scriptwriting.”

Once upon a time, Canada had something that was called a “motion picture industry.” These “movies” were like episodes of television, except you only made one and it was about two hours long. And, thanks to Telefilm Canada (TFC), the director was completely in control of the movie. TFC even had a special term for this level of creative control: the director was called an “auteur.” And writers were called “story editors.”

But like the dinosaur, the dodo and child actors with addiction issues, movies started to die out. The auteurs needed to find shelter and craft services and relevance. Eventually, they migrated over to the land of television where they were stunned to find production teams making decisions long before they showed up and planning to make decisions long after they left.

The auteurs realized to their dismay that in television, they weren't the most important person on set. So they arbitrarily placed the word “cinematic” in front of “television” to describe an extremely successful series.

By saying these shows were “cinematic” the directors managed to erase the fact that some writer had spent years developing and nurturing a series pilot to green-light, and focus everyone's attention on the three weeks they had spent fighting to make sure they got the equipment they needed to shoot

that shot they really want for their demo reel.

Your director hasn't mutilated your script. He's made it *cinematic*. Okay... *maybe* they've thrown out your characters' motivations in order to spend the day shooting explosions, but they've shot those explosions so cinematically that no viewer will care the story is now an incoherent mishmash of scenes.

The director has done you a favour by reworking your material without your involvement and/or knowledge, so you can rediscover your own story in the editing room. And that's a gift that you can't put a price tag on.

Unless you know what your per-episode budget is.

**Oh, Great Scribe: There's been a lot of press lately about the CRTC and their recent policy decisions involving Canadian content requirements, pick and pay cable package options and watching American Super Bowl commercials without having the show interrupted by something called a “sim-sub.” I have to tell you, I'm an industry professional and I don't know what most of these things are. I'm really confused. Can you explain this to me?**

A: Happy to help! Confusion is a lack of understanding; uncertainty; or the state of being unclear in one's own mind about something. ■

## May

**21-23** — Inside Out Toronto LGBT Film Festival [insideout.ca](http://insideout.ca)

**22-24** — TO WebFest [towebfest.com](http://towebfest.com)

## June

**7-10** — Banff World Media Festival [banffmediafestival.com](http://banffmediafestival.com)

**30** — Writers Talking TV, TIFF Bell Lightbox [wgc.ca](http://wgc.ca)

## July

**15** — *Deadline* — Bell Fund, various programs [bellfund.ca/deadlines](http://bellfund.ca/deadlines)

## August

**27-Sept. 7** — Montreal World Film Festival [ffm-montreal.org/en/home.html](http://ffm-montreal.org/en/home.html)

## September

**3-6** — Fan Expo [fanexpocanada.com](http://fanexpocanada.com)

**10-20** — Toronto International Film Festival [tiff.net](http://tiff.net)

**17-24** — Atlantic Film Festival [atlanticfilm.com](http://atlanticfilm.com)

**24-Oct. 9** — Vancouver International Film Festival [viff.org](http://viff.org)

## October

**1** — *Deadline* — Bell Fund, various programs [bellfund.ca/deadlines](http://bellfund.ca/deadlines)

**1-10** — Edmonton Film Festival [edmontonfilmfest.com](http://edmontonfilmfest.com)

**12-14** — International Affiliation of Writers Guilds (IAWG) meeting, Tel Aviv [iawg.org](http://iawg.org)



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# WGC SCREENWRITING AWARDS

CELEBRATING CANADA'S SCREENWRITERS

## Congratulations to Our Winners!

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

### CHILDREN & YOUTH

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

### DOCUMENTARY

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

### MOVIES & MINISERIES

*Elephant Song*  
Written by **Nicolas Billon**

### SHORTS & WEBSERIES

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

### TV COMEDY

*Mr. D*, Season 3  
"Old School"  
Written by **Andrew De Angelis**

### TV DRAMA

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

### SPECIAL AWARDS

**Showrunner Award** - Bruce Smith  
**Sondra Kelly Award** - Alison Lea Bingeman  
**Writers Block Award** - Denis McGrath

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