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Contents

Time to warm up your pitch

If success were easy, anyone could achieve it.

But — while it's obviously important — talent is not necessarily enough on its own to guarantee success. Writers need to sell their work, too. No matter how talented you are, if you can't pitch, no one listens and all that ability and effort can go for naught.

So sure, as some of the screenwriters in the article inside on pitching suggest: work on your chops. Do your research. Write something you feel passionate about. And then, once you have something to sell, learn how to pitch it.

Who knows how many scripts are out there sitting in the desk drawers of quiet, introverted and talented people who just don't have that one skill that will help open doors for them?

It will come as no surprise to you that many writers are introverts. Not all, but let's face it — a lot of people write because it's something that can be and often is, a solitary effort.

One of your best sources for information about selling your work is your fellow screenwriters. Ask if they've pitched and how it went. Ask if they've pitched successfully and why they think it was successful.

Right — you're an introvert. You can't even bring yourself to ask a fellow writer. Fine. Sure, some of you work with others, that's great. You still have to pitch.

Diane Wild has sought out a wide range of seasoned veteran and new up-and-coming screenwriters and talked to them about the Art of the Pitch.

We tell you how to get started and what you should have before you ask for some producer or broadcaster's time. Preparation is key. Whether it's in the shape of index cards, coming up with the "cool or immediately gettable" idea, or putting together a document outlining the look and feel of the show to make it easy to imagine, it's time to be a prepper. Our sources say they were preppers — wouldn't you like to be a prepper too?

Once you have your prep work done, you need to hone your performance. We have great advice on how to do that as well. And finally, we give you some tips on what to look for, to gauge how the pitch is going. The best part about all of this is you don't have to talk to anyone.

I mean, eventually, you have to. Eventually, you have to pitch.

But you can take that first step of reading this magazine. It could be the first step in a long journey to success.

So come on, be a writer, be a prepper, polish your pitch and learn what to watch for to measure how you're doing.

It may not work the first time.

But the more you do, the further you go, and the closer to success you will be.

Get out of the bullpen and into the game. It's time to start pitching.

— Tom Villemaire

Fall 2016

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*, and many others. She has interviewed a diverse range of intriguing personalities, including Oscar, Emmy, Grammy, Tony, and Pulitzer winners. Follow her on Twitter @mysteriouskat.

Laurie Channer is the Director of Industrial Relations for the Writers Guild of Canada.

For over 15 years, **Greg David** has been a television critic for *TV Guide Canada*, the country's most trusted source for TV news. A former member of the Television Critics Association, he is currently a partner at *TV,Eh?*, a website (www.tv-eh.com) devoted to covering the Canadian television industry.

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.*

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*, *Maclean's*, *The Toronto Star* and many others. His book, *The View from Here: Conversations with Gay and Lesbian Filmmakers* (Arsenal Pulp), won a 2008 Lambda Literary Award.

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

Anne Wheeler is a writer/director who has been working in film and television for more than forty years. As a storyteller, the majority of her work has been Canadian in content, for which she has received seven honorary doctorates, the Order of Canada, and most recently the Lifetime Award, from the Director's Guild of Canada.

Inspiration

After a day spent talking with three WGC members about the craft and art of screenwriting my funk lifted. The words of Simon Racioppa, Penny Gummerson, and Bruce Smith rang true in my head. They each spoke brilliantly and passionately about the value of story in human lives, their work, and what inspired them to keep going.

This hasn't been a stellar fall. First came the CRTC decision to lower the point count to 6 out of 10 for "Certified Independent Production Funds." Then the fear that the Canada Media Fund would follow suit wiping out many screenwriting jobs. Then the Heritage Ministry's Canadian Content in a Digital World Consultations moved into a new phase and it seemed like screenwriter voices weren't going to be heard. I've spent most of the last month trying to express why what screenwriters do is important; to justify our place in a country that has always seemed hostile to us, but now more than ever.

Maybe some doubt was creeping in. Maybe the fight is tiring me out. But I found myself wondering, *is it worth it?*

But after a day spent talking with three WGC members about the craft and art of screenwriting my funk lifted. The words of Simon Racioppa, Penny Gummerson, and Bruce Smith rang true in my head. They each spoke brilliantly and passionately about the value of story in human lives, their work, and what inspired them to keep going.

Story's power — to inspire, to heal, to help us find truth — was an important thread to each of them.

As a kid in suburban Toronto, Simon was an avid reader of fantasy and sci-fi. He remembers the jolt he felt when he found a novel set in Canada and the revelation he suddenly felt: *anything can happen, even here!* Just the mention of the Glebe was enough to make his world seem so much larger; to make all kinds of things seem possible. This is one of story's powers: to help us dream; to open our minds to new possibilities and to inspire us to reach beyond the mundane.

It can also heal. Growing up in the north, Penny spent many hours seated at the adults' feet listening to their stories. These stories connected her to a history and culture we've barely seen in Canadian media. Later, when she began to hear the stories of the residential school system, Penny began to understand how the deep trauma of generations continued to take a terrible toll on her people, her family, herself. She knows how important it is tell those stories widely — not just for herself, her family and those who feel the impact of what happened every day of their lives. But also for all Canadians. We can only come to grips with the past if we know what happened.

To quote Bruce, "you can get to simple clear persuasive truths in fiction that you can't get to purely through fact particularly about controversial issues, upsetting situations, about things like justice and abuse." Penny, Bruce, and Simon each mentioned how moving it is when a viewer reaches out to say thanks for telling their story, for bringing their truth to light. Story can be cathartic; that moment when you realize you're not alone. Others see you and share in your feelings.

I think I've been grieving for the stories Canadians haven't told, but Bruce reminded me that Canada's is a young culture, barely 150 years old. We have reached a unique moment in time. We have the craft to tell our stories. Our crews are mature. Our business types have built the pipelines and have access to a global market. We have a critical mass of directors, actors and other television artists ready to support our vision. And Canadian screenwriters are experienced and the masters of their craft. It's our time.

There are many tales yet to be told. We have the chops and teams to tell them. But what is more we have the passion to tell them. A passion for our country that we feel when we see a Canadian place name in print, or when we watch the aurora borealis dance or when we're finally on the plane, leaving L.A. and heading home.

That's why we write and that's why we keep fighting for our place.

— Jill Golick

The WGC Policy Decoder

The WGC's "Policy Decoder" looks at policy issues that concern Canadian screenwriters/showrunners: the primary creators of television in Canada. This edition decodes what is arguably the most important government review of Canada's cultural policies in a generation.

What's The Big Idea: "Canadian Content in a Digital World," the Department of Canadian Heritage consultations on how to "strengthen the creation, discovery and export of Canadian content in a digital world."

Decoded: The government wants to expand Canada's share in the international content market, among other things.

The consultations were first announced in the *Globe and Mail* on Apr. 25, 2016. Minister Mélanie Joly's aim, as stated in the Globe, was to "bring Canada's cultural properties — everything from the Broadcast (sic) Act to the CRTC — into the digital age." "Everything is on the table," Joly told the Globe. Everything except, as it turned out, considering over-the-top (OTT) services like Crave, or Netflix. In June, 2016, Joly was quoted in the Financial Post as saying "there will be no Netflix tax," echoing the previous, Conservative government's stance on refusing to require OTT services to make a regulated contribution to the Canadian broadcasting system.

Why Care: The consultations could have profound consequences for Canadian screenwriters/showrunners, and not only because OTT providers slipped off the table. If, for example, the federal government decided the Canada Media Fund (CMF) no longer need be a ten-out-of-ten point CAVCO fund, there would be a lot less work for Canadian screenwriters. And it's not as if "service" work is an option for screenwriters. In order to have a thriving Canadian industry, creating original, Canadian programming must be paramount. At time of writing, the government is still in the consultations process, meeting with various stakeholders across the country, including WGC screenwriters/showrunners. Consequently it's not possible to say what the outcome of the consultations will be. What is possible is to provide a short list of reasons why you should care about how the consultations play out:

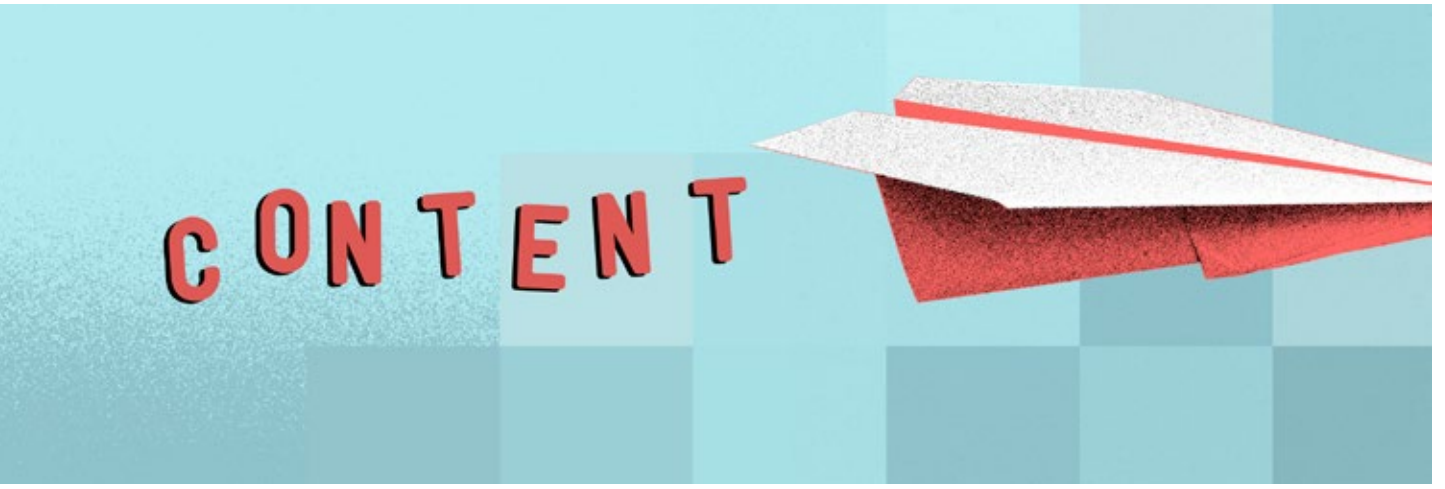
1. Canadian content productions already are successful. International sales for Canadian shows are worth more than half a billion dollars. Canadian shows are sold to upwards of 200 countries and territories. This success is based on a regulated system ensuring Canadian content is written by Canadian screenwriters.

2. The current government is looking to expand Canada's place in the international content market to help grow the industry. Of course that is a goal Canadian screenwriters/showrunners also share. But not at the expense of our stories. Canadian talent — the screenwriters and showrunners who generate the ideas and scripts that fuel an entire industry — should not be sacrificed in order to obtain international financing.

3. Showrunners are the creative drivers of Canadian content productions, not producers. And showrunners are writers. Where a showrunner role exists, it must be held by a Canadian to be considered a Canadian production.

4. There is a tendency to "rush to production" in Canada, which doesn't provide screenwriters enough time or resources to adequately develop scripts. In addition, development is often unpaid, transferring the financial burden to screenwriters. Development must be prioritized and sufficiently financed. One way of

ILLUSTRATION: OURS



achieving this would be for the government to support something like Denmark's "One Vision" model for television production. Under that model, screenwriters get three to four years of development — and complete creative control. Not surprisingly, they regularly deliver internationally successful content of the highest caliber.

Where It's Going: The most recent stage of the consultation was officially launched on Sept. 13, 2016, by Minister Joly, and concludes Nov. 25, 2016. The WGC and its members have been working tirelessly through speaking with representatives of the current government and through the media to help broaden understanding of the value of Canadian screenwriters and showrunners, and the importance of maintaining a talent pool in this country. The decision is expected early in 2017.

CRTC's CIPFs Ruling...and the Canada Media Fund

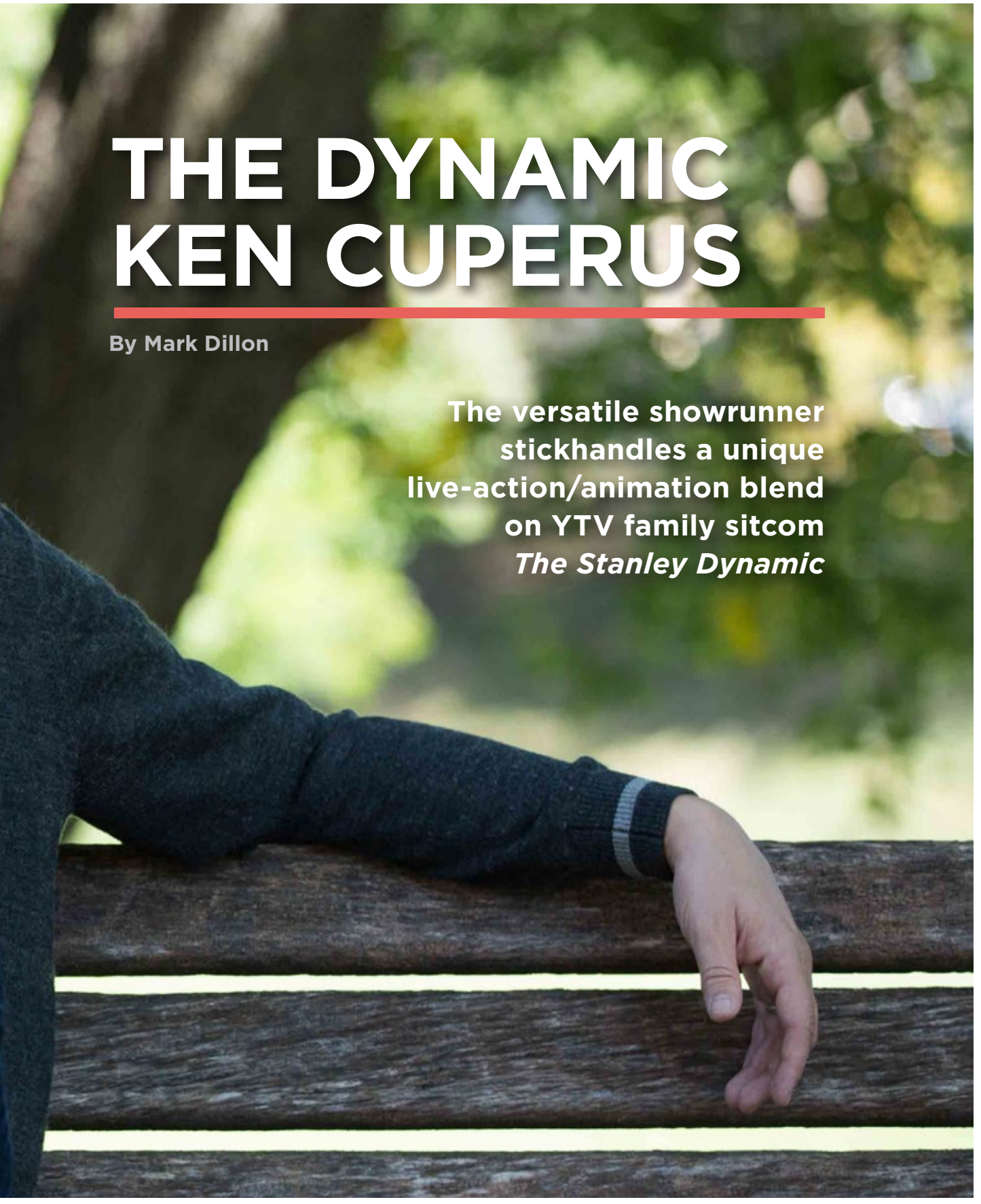
The CRTC's decision in the review of "Certified Independent Production Funds" (CIPFs), released Aug. 25, 2016, had insupportable news: the minimum CAVCO point requirements for CIPFs to fund a production were dropped from eight to six. One stated reason: "[It could] facilitate the hiring by production companies of non-Canadian actors or creators, who may increase a project's attractiveness and visibility in international markets." The WGC, and many other organizations and individuals, were shocked. WGC Executive Director Maureen Parker put it succinctly: "That the CRTC, a public authority charged with regulating Canadian broadcasting, would effectively denigrate Canadian showrunners and screenwriters and suggest our country's creators cannot deliver international success is shocking. It's also verifiably untrue."

The CRTC decision was not, however, an isolated instance. An increasingly pervasive view suggests Canadian tax dollars should not be put towards productions created by Canadians. This unfortunate notion — that reducing the presence of Canadian talent is the ticket to more international funding — has been taking hold.

The same logic that supported the CRTC's CIPFs decision could be applied to the Canada Media Fund. While the CRTC is at arm's length from the government of Canada, the CMF, a ten-out-of-ten point fund, is not. Heritage Minister Joly does influence the mandate of the CMF, and the CMF must remain a ten-point fund.

WGC in the News

WGC members have been in the news this autumn, responding to the CRTC's CIPFs decision and to the government's "Canadian Content in a Digital World" consultations. Members including Graeme Manson, Dennis Heaton, Mark Ellis, Denis McGrath, Emily Andras, Jason Filiatrault, Simon Barry, President Jill Golick, as well as WGC Executive Director Maureen Parker, have all been sought out by media including the CBC, the *Globe and Mail*, the *Toronto Star*, *Vancouver Sun*, *The Financial Post*, *CARTT*, and *Playback* to provide perspective on the creators' response to the changes happening, or potentially about to happen, in the Canadian screen-based industry. Members have also been highly active on social media, using what has become the primary Twitter hashtag for Canadian television: #CdnTV. The WGC thanks all of our members for their engagement with the crucial issues facing the industry. ■



THE DYNAMIC KEN CUPERUS

By Mark Dillon

The versatile showrunner stickhandles a unique live-action/animation blend on YTV family sitcom *The Stanley Dynamic*

The Stanley Dynamic is, for the most part, a traditional family comedy. It features high school-age twins Larry (Charles Vandervaart) and Luke (Taylor Abrahamse), precocious younger sister Lori (Madison Ferguson) — all wacky — and parents Lisa (Kate Hewlett) and Lane (Michael Barbuto) — wackier still. Co-creator and showrunner Ken Cuperus calls the show an homage to *Family Ties*, a defining series of his 1980s youth. But *The Stanley Dynamic* is unique in one major way: within its live-action world, brother Luke just happens to be a cartoon character.

It's never fully explained — to paraphrase Lady Gaga, he was born this way. This much we know, as the opening-credit sequence shows mom in her hospital bed with her two new babies — one real, the other animated.

"It was my intention to never explain it, because I thought the answer wouldn't be as fun as the question," Cuperus tells *Canadian Screenwriter*. "I like when people come up with their own theories instead and say Luke's cartoonist dad created him, or he came to life. In the pilot I have Luke tell a girl how the zygote split in his mother's womb and he got all the cartoon parts."

The idea itself was born in a good news/bad news meeting with then-YTV execs Jamie Piekarz and Jocelyn Hamilton.

"I had a different show with them, and on the day it was to be greenlit they called and said 'We're really sorry, but we have to shelf it,'" Cuperus recalls. "But they said they had another concept: 'We want to do a show with a family where one of them is a cartoon. Do you think a) you could create a show like that, and b) is it even producible?' I said, 'I can certainly create it, and I think we can produce it.' So they let me have free reign to create whatever I wanted within that simple premise."

Amaze Film + Television came aboard as producers. Soon they all may have felt they'd bitten off more than they could chew. While there's a legacy of animated characters in live-action movies — from Jerry Mouse hoofing alongside Gene Kelly in *Anchors Aweigh* (1945) to *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* (1988) — the makers felt they were on uncharted waters in a multi-cam sitcom format.

"We shoot it like a play. Throughout a three-minute scene that animated character is going to be moving around, and the actors have to remember where he is going to be," Cuperus points out. "It's incredibly challenging."

They shot a three-minute camera test with animation provider 9 Story Media Group, but in the resulting footage the character and environment didn't mesh.

"It was kind of disastrous," Cuperus says with a laugh. "We all looked at it and I was able to say, 'Here's where we went wrong and here's the easy fix.' If we hadn't done that test we may have gone out of the gate in a negative way and the show probably would not have been successful. YTV was so gracious and supportive and trusting we were going to get it right."

They tried generating Luke's movements via a performer in a motion-capture suit. They tried split screens and green screens. The system they decided on begins with a reference pass for 9 Story featuring voice actor Abrahamse performing alongside the other actors on the set. The scene is later shot with nothing in Luke's place and Abrahamse saying his lines off-camera. 9 Story adds the animated character later.

A more realistic 3-D design was rejected in favor of bringing Luke to life with Flash software.

"Because his dad is a comic-strip artist, we wanted to give him a two-dimensional paper feel," Cuperus explains. "Flash is quite rigid, so we don't have the freedom of most animated shows. It's difficult to do certain things. We can't have our character just turn around in a circle because Flash doesn't work like that. So we have to get creative."

9 Story has a couple of staffers always on set. Cuperus says that when he wants to push the boundaries of what Luke can do, the animation house

"We shoot it like a play. Throughout a three-minute scene that animated character is going to be moving around, and the actors have to remember where he is going to be ... It's incredibly challenging."

INTRO SPREAD PHOTO: CHRISTINA GAPIC

From left: Darren Kaliciak (script coordinator), Rupinder Gill, Sara Hennessey, Ken Cuperus, Matt Kippen, Jeremy Winkles, Cole Bastedo

nearly always finds a way. And Luke does things only a cartoon character can do. For example, in the season one episode "The Stanley Spirit," Luke elongates his neck three feet to have a better look at a ghost-detecting device. Later, he's trapped in an elevator during a ghost tour, and his panicked, eyeball-popping, mouth-agape reaction is straight out of Looney Tunes.

"We pick and choose our moments," Cuperus says. "Luke is often slightly separated from the other characters. But in our pilot we have mom give a big hug to him and Larry at the same time. Those are my favorite moments: when he feels like a real kid and you forget he wasn't really there when you were shooting."

The series can afford an average eight Luke minutes per 22-minute episode. If it exceeds that in one episode, it must pull back in a later one. So while one show is heavy on Luke using some slick moves to survive a dodge-ball onslaught, he spends another in a suit of armor, his face seen only when the faceplate is raised. In still another he walks into his dad's magic trunk and is heard and not seen. Still another way to reduce Luke's screen time is to bump up the supporting cast's presence.

"These are tricks we've used to stretch the budget," Cuperus notes. "We have to work around our restrictions. It's a give-and-take."

The most recent room of writers devising these tricks also included Cuperus' "number two" Jeremy Winkels; stand-up comic Sara Hennessey; Rupinder Gill, who has also written for Comedy's *The Beaverton*; Matt Kippen, a collaborator of Cuperus' since high school; and seasoned scribe Cole Bastedo. The multi-cam process saw them putting in 8 a.m. to midnight days at Revival studios in Toronto's East End.

Ample rewrite time was built into that schedule, which sees one episode produced weekly. Monday would feature a table read with the actors followed by the room's first window to rewrite. The next day the scribes would watch the actors perform a walk-through on the lit set.

"We laugh and discover what's funny and what's not," Cuperus explains. "We then take that information back up to the writing room Tuesday night and work for another four or five hours and rewrite, and the next day we do it all over again. We do two complete run-throughs and the script gets funnier and better after each one." Thursday and Friday were blocked off for shooting. >>

Making co-viewable comedy

Children love cartoons like Bugs Bunny loves carrots. But of course not all animated fare is family-friendly. Parents who brought their kids to see *Sausage Party* were no doubt sweating like steamies during that foodstuffs orgy scene.

Producing animated series suitable for both kids and adults is a much sought-after goal. But how can you simultaneously satisfy these disparate demographics? Writers in touch with their inner child certainly help.

One such case is Radical Sheep Productions' *The Bagel and Becky Show*, co-developed by Ken Cuperus (who left to run *The Stanley Dynamic*) and showrunners Adam Rotstein and Doug Hadders. The 52 x 11 series, slated to air early in the New Year on Teletoon, tracks the adventures of Bagel the dog and his sister Becky the cat. It is adapted from a book by Dave Cooper with a change in tone.

"We stick closely to the characters. But the book is geared to four-to-six-year-olds and Teletoon was focusing on kids eight to 11, so the show was developed with that in mind," Rotstein says. He adds he and Hadders are a good fit for it because "We're emotionally stunted. Physically we're 150, but emotionally we're eight to 11. We capture the voice of that generation. We're the Lena Dunham of eight to 11."

Adds Hadders: "It's going to be fun for kids. There's lots of wacky, stupid stuff. Then there's stuff we laugh at. That's our gauge. I write what I laugh, and if people like it, I have a job."

The duo hopes for a primetime slot to reel in both kids and the after-work crowd. The show is rife with sardonic humour yet not inappropriate for its younger core demo.

"Our humour doesn't skew that violent or gross or dark," Hadders says. "But there's some dark social behaviour that somehow creeps in." And supporting character Percy the pigeon — whom Hadders also voices—is usually the butt of it. He addresses his parents' divorce, how the kids were separated and he had no one to play with. Not usual kid cartoon fare.

So while on some shows themes skew older, elsewhere it's the references, as in *Fangbone!*, adapted by showrunners Simon Racioppa and Richard Elliott from a trilogy of graphic novels by Michael Rex about the clashes of a young barbarian who lands in a modern third-grade class.

Also produced by Radical Sheep, *Fangbone!* airs on Family Chrgd in Canada and Disney XD in the U.S. The format is 52 X 11, with each pair of episodes packaged together as a TV half-hour. Sometimes they are two-parters, and the season-one finale is a solid 22 minutes. (Producers are awaiting word on a season two pickup.) Amidst the zany comedy, there is a fantasy element for kids of all ages.

"The goal was to make it feel like a big movie adventure," Racioppa says. "All the stories have classic three-act structures. The 22-minute episodes are that but more amplified, with stories that are bigger and more detailed."

The writers amuse themselves — and, they hope, a similarly aged audience — with nostalgia.

"I've seen kids as young as three glued to the

Cuperus, 44, honed his comedy chops in his native Winnipeg, performing in sketch/improv troupe Brave New Weasels starting in high school. The 236-seat Planetarium Auditorium attached to the Manitoba Museum became the troupe's home base, and it also appeared in fringe festivals nationwide. They relocated to Toronto in 1996, but found it far more competitive and soon drifted apart. Cuperus pursued his passion for writing.

He amassed credits on animated series in the early aughts — some for kids, such as *The Berenstain Bears* and *George Shrinks*, and some for adults, including *John Callahan's Quads!* His career snowballed from there, as he took on the showrunner role on *My Dad the Rock Star* and *Di-Gata Defenders*. From there he successfully branched out, landing staff positions on sci-fi dramas *Stargate Atlantis* and *Stargate SG-1*. His drama work also includes procedural *The Listener*.

In 2010 he joined as writer/consulting producer on *Mr. Young*, about a teen genius who becomes a teacher. His teacher on the series was creator Dan

From left: Simon Racioppa; Adam Rotstein and Doug Hadders; Tom McGillis

show, but a lot is aimed at older kids and adults," Racioppa continues. "We pepper it with references from our youth. There's lots of *Dungeons & Dragons*, *Conan* and *The Lord of the Rings*. I want to make a show kids like and that I and people like me also will sit down and enjoy. The fantasy geek demographic is where we live."

The globally popular *Total Drama* franchise has found similar success by using the template of an older-skewing genre. In this case, it was conceived as a parody of reality-show blockbuster *Survivor*. The first season, titled *Total Drama Island*, launched on Teletoon in 2007, and *Total Drama Presents: The Ridonculous Race*, the most recent incarnation, airs on Cartoon Network Canada.

Tom McGillis, president of prodco Fresh TV, says he and Jennifer Pertsch set out to create a show for tweens.

"We wrote it for an 11-year-old boy," he elaborates. "At that time, every pitch would say 'great for the whole family.' Ours didn't. We said that if the parents had to turn to their 11-year-old and ask, 'What does that mean?', then the kid would feel smarter than their parent and we'd have won. We never tried to grab an adult audience, but we've gotten one."

And that's likely for the same reason that makes actual strategy-based reality shows so popular. Over the course of a season, up to 22 16-year-old contestant characters forge partnerships and try to overcome challenges and eliminations until one is left to collect big prize money. It is a rare serialized animated series, which McGillis says "engages viewers at a higher level and keeps them watching."

"It operates on two levels," he adds. "There's politics among characters. There are alliances and there's backstabbing. And there is always complex game-play going on. If you're a younger kid you may not be tracking it all, but if you're older, it's like watching a sports season — it gets more satisfying as things play out."

So what keeps the younger kids watching? McGillis acknowledges, "They like the fart jokes." ■

ROSTEING AND HADDERS PHOTO: DAVE DIAS; MCGILLIS PHOTO: TRISH MENNELL PHOTOGRAPHY

Signer, who imparted the ins and outs of running a multi-cam sitcom.

Cuperus also found his stage roots coming into play when leading the room on *The Stanley Dynamic*.

"When we talk through a story I treat every scene like an individual sketch," he elaborates. "In a multi-cam show there are many small scenes and they all have their own common engine. We don't break it like a drama, where you find your major beats. We break it scene by scene and they're their own little plays. My sketch-comedy background prepared me for that."

The Stanley Dynamic's second 26-episode season goes to air on YTV in January, while its producers await news of a season three pickup and a U.S. sale. It already has sold throughout Europe, including Germany, where it is airs as *Mein Comic-Bruder Luke*. Cuperus is crossing his fingers for more brutally long days for him and his collaborators.

"I think all the writers would agree we've enjoyed coming to work in the morning," he says. "We laugh all day long. We just have a great time." ■

Clockwise from top left: Mark Farrell; Tassie Cameron; Adam Barken; Michael McGowan; Michael Amo; Dan Williams and Lienne Sawatsky

THE ART OF THE PITCH

By Diane Wild

The Art of the Pitch is about six writers — seven, really, but we'll get to that later — who reveal to an unseen interviewer their experiences pitching TV shows. Think *Episodes* meets *The Office* meets *Canadian Screenwriter* magazine. It's about tips, cautionary tales, and the bond that develops — or really, really doesn't — between pitcher and pitchee.

Our characters come from the drama, comedy, and animation worlds:

- **Tassie Cameron**: With *Rookie Blue* and *Flashpoint* making her one of today's most sought-after writer/showrunners, she's got *10 Days in the Valley* coming up on ABC plus *Mary Kills People* for Global.
- **Adam Barken**: This man is everywhere. He's written for *Killjoys*, the *Bruno and Boots* movies, *X Company*, and recently sold his sci-fi pitch *Memoria* to BBC America.
- **Michael McGowan**: Largely known as a filmmaker, with *Saint Ralph* and *One Week* among his notable successes as a writer/director, McGowan created *Between* for City and Netflix.
- **Michael Amo**: Can you say persistent? He's in production on his CBC series *Pure* about Mennonite drug smugglers after eight years of crafting, pitching, and optioning and re-optioning a magazine article with money earned from his time on *The Listener*.
- **Mark Farrell:** With classic Canadian comedy cred from *The Red Green Show*, *The Newsroom*, *Made in Canada*, and *Corner Gas*, he's more recently made his mark on *This Hour Has 22 Minutes*, *Dan for Mayor* and *Seed*.
- **Lienne Sawatsky** and **Dan Williams**: This real-life couple are our two-in-one writing team who now have a Teletoon series called *Wishfart* in production about a leprechaun who grants wishes that go very, very wrong.

Let me show you the article so you can see where I'm going with this:

It all starts with …

Preparing for a pitch. Knowing your material inside and out, and being able to present it in front of others without curling into a fetal position, is crucial.

Cameron walked into ABC with the script for *10 Days in the Valley* already written, which isn't always the case. But she learned the importance of preparation after a disastrous first pitch in the U.S., where she was expecting a casual chat and ended up locked in a hotel room for two days to learn how to do it right. Now, exhaustive preparation is "the cost of doing business. I've worked very hard on pitches for shows that have never gone anywhere."

She thinks she still might have 37 sweaty index cards with her *Rookie Blue* pitch notes on them, and she had answers to whatever questions might be thrown at her. "Most important is to really know why this matters to you, why you're the only person who can tell the story how it should be told," she says. "My take on *Rookie Blue* was it's a show about imposter syndrome, and I know that very well."

For Barken, the core of any pitch is that the idea must be "cool or immediately getable, with an emotional hook that gets the person leaning forward. From there, it's a rough idea of what the story is, and ideally that's when the person starts asking questions." That's when he fleshes out the idea of the pilot, the world, and how it can run for five seasons.

Barken doesn't usually bring pages to leave behind, but instead offers to send material in the next couple of days to allow for rewrites based on the reaction in the room. "You don't want to show up with something and have them say they love everything but the robot dog. If your script is called *Robot Dog*, you're in trouble."

Besides sending a teaser of the pitch in advance so the producer is already prepped, for animation pitches Sawatsky and Williams have also brought artwork with them, which she calls a risky tactic but one that's paid off. "You can bring along a look book — something that portrays the general style and tone of the show, a scrapbook of the dream cast, images that fit the look you're going for."

She says the main thing they've learned is that producers can be receptive to giving feedback on a concept early on, allowing them to "bulletproof the idea," in the words of her partner Williams. They've gained valuable advice, such as aging their concept down, and some producers invited them to reach out for a formal pitch when they were ready.

Writers are split on the wisdom of writing a spec script first. For some, like Barken, that's what the development money is for, plus there isn't always time. For others, like Williams, writing the script is how they solidify their idea and know it will work as a series. And sometimes a writer just wants to write.

After years of rejection, Amo wrote the *Pure* pilot script as consolation after another of his piloted shows failed to get picked up. Did it make his pitches more successful? "Again, crickets."

> "We used to go to pitches with nothing in our hands and almost no idea what we're going to say. We thought, we know this, we'll just talk about the idea."

"I've pitched the script, but you have to know you might have to throw it out depending how they react," says Farrell. "Sometimes I wasn't sure and I wanted to make sure I could write it."

Though he's gone into development based on a paragraph, McGowan tends to do what he does with film: write the script first. With *Between*, he had a mini-bible and wrote the pilot "out of curiosity to see if I could sustain it. Some stuff I've pitched and then realized in developing the concept that I don't really like it on further examination."

Another advantage is shortcutting a step in development. "The marketplace can shift and they're no longer looking for the show you've spent a year and a half working with them on, because someone else has done it or the time has passed for that kind of show."

The performance

Farrell compares the performance of a pitch to an audition for an actor. "The skill you're demonstrating is different from the skill you're trying to get hired for." As a stand-up, he says "I think I'm pretty good at it but it's one of those other unfair things about show biz: people who can pitch well can't necessary write well and vice versa."

"Everyone tells you that you have to be super animated," says McGowan. "The best pitch is to believe in the show and be able to talk about it. I don't think there's a right way to do it."

"You have to be authentic to who you are," says Cameron. "People read false notes very quickly. Some of the best pitchers are actors, because they can command a room. I wish I was that person but I'm not. I've had to embrace who I am, and I am someone who would rather not be doing this. I need my written documents in front of me. I'm going to be present and engaged in the room, but there's not a lot of pyrotechnics."

"We used to go to pitches with nothing in our hands and almost no idea what we're going to say. We thought, we know this, we'll just talk about the idea," says Sawatsky. After their agent called to tell them a producer said "you were really charming and she really liked you and you were horrible pitchers," they realized a change in style might be in order.

They had a pitch meeting for a show they hadn't created, where they were up against a few other writers, and "we really prepared this time," says Sawatsky. "We wrote down the pitch, who would say what, practiced a couple times, had a cheat sheet of points in our notebook. We absolutely nailed that pitch, and we knew we were nailing it. We thought, how is it that we've been pitching for 10 years and have never done it that way before?"

Practicing out loud to other people is a universal recommendation. Barken recalls one of his first pitches as one of the best experiences, when he went to the Banff festival with a writing partner who was also an actor. "I was doing the typical writer thing and pitching like an essay. He said that's incredibly boring, I don't want to do that." They worked out a script and practiced enough to make it sound conversational. "You can go in and wing it if you feel confident about that, but I just don't. It takes work to sound off the cuff."

He recommends pitching as though you've just seen a show no one else knows about and are trying to convince your friends to watch it. "The best way to learn to pitch is to hear people pitch. You realize how quickly you can get bored."

Both Barken and Cameron have moved away from cue cards, but prefer having an outline to refer to. As Barken says, no one blinks at a writer carrying a notebook. "The key is comfort. It's a nerve wracking experience and whatever you need to make yourself comfortable is what will make the person listening to you feel comfortable. As long as you're wearing pants."

The tells

How do you know the pitch is landing? It can be as easy as "they pretty much bought it in the room." That was Barken's experience with *Memoria*, a high-concept sci-fi series that required a lot of world-building and working on the vision before he was ready to pitch it.

Or it can be as hard as Cameron's "I can never really tell if it's working because I'm always so plagued with neuroses and doubts." That said, she can read body language. "There have been moments where I feel it's going sideways or they're not engaging and I'll stop mid-pitch." Asking what's not working for them can startle them into revealing the truth, so she can address the concerns head-on and revise her pitch on the fly. "It's not a pitching strategy, it's desperation."

Sometimes the clue a pitch isn't going over well isn't so subtle. "In a meeting that's going well, the person you're pitching to is usually not texting at the same time." Yes, that's happened to Sawatsky and Williams. So has an executive dismissing their idea and literally flicking their one-pager back at them. (Williams: "After the meeting the assistant asked, so, do you want to leave any material?")

While engaged questions tend to indicate a positive response, an interrogation indicates the opposite. "Most of my bad pitches were because the audience didn't want to be there," says Barken.

If you're making the people in charge of the department laugh, you know you've got a good chance.

"They're just picking holes at it. They're clearly not interested, not going to buy it, but for some reason they're stuck there listening to you and they're going to have some fun."

"Sometimes you know the project doesn't have much of a chance because of who they send to meet you," says Farrell. "If you're making the people in charge of the department laugh, you know you've got a good chance."

In the end, luck and timing play a big role, so passion and a thick skin are required.

"You can get bogged down in second guessing what the broadcasters want, and they suffer from the same thing," says McGowan. "Everyone wants the next *Walking Dead* or *Orphan Black*, but you're always two years behind because of how long it takes to get a show into production. It's much better to write the show you want to write."

Pure's Amo would agree. "*True Detective* happened and suddenly everybody seemed to be in the market for limited series — including a Canadian network that put us into development for several more years. Heads rolled there and we were shown the door. The moment after my partner and I hung up on the call that cut us loose, we contacted the CBC and here we are, in production. Funny thing is I don't think getting a 'commercial idea' into production would be any easier. So if you're going to pitch something, it might as well be something you love."

So that's the article in a nutshell. Any questions? ■

CANADIANS DON'T NEED FOREIGN SCREENWRITERS TO HELP SELL CANADIAN CONTENT ABROAD

BY MATTHEW HAYS

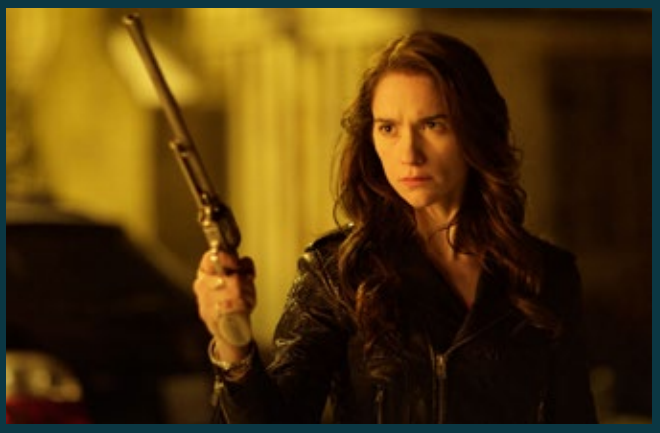
Canadians were euphoric on Emmy night back in September, when Tatiana Maslany accepted her well-earned award for starring as numerous clones in the show *Orphan Black*. It's a moment I won't ever forget, because of this: In the Mile End Montreal neighbourhood I live in, for some reason there are a number of people who work in film and/or TV. It was a warm autumn night, so everyone had their windows open. When Maslany's name was called, I could hear shrieks of euphoria through my window. It was a moment of intense pride in our national culture, the things we create and the people who make them.

This was the big leagues — a show and its star taking home the gold in the arena of TV, a medium everyone acknowledges is home to the greatest ideas, writing and talent (a stunning revolution, really, given that a few decades ago TV was seen as the lowbrow medium). It was a tribute to its screenwriters and especially the showrunners, Graeme Manson and John Fawcett.

Yet amid all of this, the collective blood pressure of those who work in Canadian cultural industries was driven sky-high by the CRTC's announcement that they intended to significantly alter the funding system: in order to tap in to vital Certified Independent Production funds, producers would only need six Canadian points instead of eight. A two-point drop might not sound like much, but as many *Canadian Screenwriter* readers know too well, in a milieu as small as the Canadian screen-based industry, it will mean a negative impact on Canadian screenwriter jobs.

In a blistering *Globe and Mail* column, critic Kate Taylor put it very well: pointing to Maslany's Emmy-winning moment, she asked why the point system would be changed, when it's obvious if producers have the choice, they will hire American talent rather than take a risk on lesser-known Canadians. "Media producers had told the CRTC that they need to be able to hire more foreigners in key creative roles and the CRTC listened," Taylor wrote, "buying the dubious argument that, in a globalized, digitized, multiplatform world, Canadians need outside help to create work that can sell abroad." Taylor rightly posed the gnawing question, an existential one for Canadian screenwriters: "At a certain point you have to wonder, how many planks can you replace with foreign talent and still call it a Canadian ship?"

It's one of those only-in-Canada, WTF moments. How on earth does this argument have any traction, especially in light of the success of the moment, *Orphan Black*? It's time to talk about the epic track record of Canadian programming travelling beyond our borders and into the hearts and minds of international audiences. For example ...



From left to right, top to bottom: 19-2; Killjoys; Murdoch Mysteries; Wynonna Earp; Degrassi Junior High; Corner Gas; Heartland

> "If a show has been properly promoted and is high quality, Canadians will watch in high numbers. This has been proven time and again. "

19-2

The cop show *19-2* has won international praise and attention for its no-nonsense — and astonishingly realistic — depiction of cops on the job. It has been nominated for an International Emmy, up against formidable series from Argentina, Germany, and the United Arab Emirates. And it gets praise like this from *The New York Times* (note to the CRTC: that's not a Canadian newspaper): "To watch *19-2* is to be reminded that there is more than one way to pace a police drama... The series is in the tradition of shows like *The Wire*, portraying law enforcement less flashily and less noisily than others, and thus more accurately."

Killjoys

The sci-fi show *Killjoys* features a kickass cast in a plot that involves outer-space bounty hunters. Since debuting last year, the show has risen to the top ten list of best-rated shows on the genre Syfy Channel. Industry bible *Variety* calls *Killjoys* "a light, well-made, zippy show that knows what it is and delivers solid action, adventure and character development despite its limited budget. The cast has terrific chemistry, and the second season of the show ably builds on the strengths of the quite enjoyable first."

Murdoch Mysteries

The series' creators set out to make a mystery show that was fun and charming. And they have succeeded, making it clear that a hit show on home turf can have legs. Now in its tenth season, Murdoch Fever has spread to the U.K., where it is the leading original series on the British crime drama channel Alibi. In France it is one of the top three highest-rated shows, where a French network broadcasts a three-hour *Murdoch* marathon every Sunday (the show appears to have taken on a religious reverence). And in Finland, *Murdoch Mysteries* beat mega-hit *Downton Abbey* as the most watched foreign program in 2014.

Wynonna Earp

Taking its comic book origins to new heights, *Wynnona Earp* recounts the adventures of Wyatt Earp's great granddaughter, as she goes to war with an odd assortment of otherworldly creatures. The show has also proven a hit on the Syfy Channel, prompting *The Hollywood Reporter* to take note: "Syfy's *Wynonna Earp* was developed for television by Emily Andras [*Lost Girl* showrunner]... Looking over the resumes of the show's other writers and stars, you'll notice a lot of *Lost Girl*, *Killjoys*, *Dark Matter* and *Being Human* credits, a reminder of how good the Canadian genre pipeline has been to Syfy."

DeGrassi

No article on this topic could not bring up the sensation that is *DeGrassi*, a show that has evolved from an earnest show about Toronto youth called *The Kids of DeGrassi Street* into an international sensation. Initially a series of after-school specials that first aired in 1979, the show has taken on a huge array of social issues, from bullying to teen alcoholism to homophobia and transphobia. It has also famously earned the love and deeply-felt admiration of acclaimed indie filmmaker Kevin Smith, who can talk about his passion for all things *DeGrassi* for (quite literally) hours.

Corner Gas

Now off the air after a successful five-year run and a feature film, *Corner Gas* became a hit with domestic audiences while also appealing to international ones. "The other myth is that Canadians don't watch Canadian TV," says Gary Pearson, who wrote for the show. "If a show has been properly promoted and is high quality, Canadians will watch in high numbers. This has been proven time and again. I worked on *Corner*

> "We often don't hear about the successes, as so much of our culture likes to focus on American shows. There are many success stories of Canadian TV shows, both popular with Canadians and sold worldwide. "

Gas, *22 Minutes*, *That's So Weird*, *The Ron James Show* and others. They all got plenty of viewers. We often don't hear about the successes, as so much of our culture likes to focus on American shows. There are many success stories of Canadian TV shows, both popular with Canadians and sold worldwide."

Heartland

In a bid to take CBC's coveted Sunday night slot back to nostalgic family viewing like *The Beachcombers* or *Road to Avonlea*, *Heartland* creators took the show about horses and the people who love them and shifted the locale to mountainous Alberta. As Leila Basen, one of the writers for the show explains, "The thing about *Heartland*, it was based on a series of books written by a British writer with stories set in Connecticut. The original pilot was to be shot in horse country outside Montreal, the idea being that it was a generic eastern seaboard location. The CBC's genius move was to move the stories to the foothills of the Rockies and be loudly and proudly Albertan. The series has sold all over the world, even a hit in North Dakota [please see sidebar], without ever compromising its Canadian pedigree, both in front of and behind the camera. So to me, this move by the CRTC is a throwback to the bad old days when D-list American showrunners would come up to Canada to run thoroughly forgettable shows."

If we leave writers from other countries to write our stories, we could see characters similar to past examples with Canadians limited to being of Scottish, English or French Canadian extraction — with the same hackneyed views. Evil French Canadian trappers (*Revenant*, *Twin Peaks*), Kilted Canadians (*Devil's Brigade*), even Canadian-sploitation movies like *Canadian Mounties Vs. Atomic Invaders*. Maybe those are the kinds of stories bureaucrats behind the funding points plans want to see, but is it what Canadians want? ■

The Best Anecdotal Evidence that Canadian Shows Travel

Leila Basen has written numerous episodes of *Heartland*, the family favourite that airs on CBC Sunday nights. She learned firsthand about just how far and wide the show is loved and appreciated one year while travelling across the continent. "It was Easter Weekend in 2010 and I was driving my pickup truck from Quebec to Alberta, heading out to start work on the fourth season of *Heartland*," she recalls. "Hearing an unfortunate grinding sound coming from the engine, I pull off the highway. I'm in Bismarck, North Dakota, and manage to find a GMC dealer that's open. There's desperation in my voice as I explain that I have to be in Alberta the next day because I start work on a television series. One thing led to another and it turned out that the boys in the garage *loved Heartland* — it was their favourite series. They opened the shop especially for me on Easter Sunday and I was back on the road by noon." ■

BARONESS VON SKETCH SHOW REIGNS IN SEASON TWO

These funny ladies are serious about getting laughs.

By Greg David

Baroness von Sketch Show stands out from the rest of the CBC's primetime schedule in a couple of ways, not the least of which because of the network notes they've gotten during production on Season two. Case in point? A scene where a mother is describing the joys of menstruation to her young daughter — poking fun at commercials celebrating the event with blue liquid poured on a sanitary napkin, horseback riding and white sun dresses — until it happens.

"They've seen the script, but what was interesting was having the shade of blood discussion," says executive producer Meredith MacNeill. "A lot of times with blood on the CBC, it all depends on the shade. We've also had a poop discussion."

"There's a lot of interesting email," fellow executive producer Jennifer Whalen says. "Re: Poop. Re: Hairy mole."

"Generally, that's not the content of our show," executive producer and showrunner Carolyn Taylor counters. What *is* the content of *Baroness von Sketch Show*? Slices of life everyone can

relate to, twisted and made totally absurd. Season one landed with a splash in June 2015, skewering — among other things — our dependence on social media when a friend request made by a stranger got *way* out of hand, how pumped-up job resumés affected a Mars landing and the struggles of using a wonky debit card reader. All three sketches — and the others on *Baroness von Sketch Show* — go off in wild directions but are firmly grounded in something viewers can relate to.

"One of the things we like to say is, 'isn't it funny that?' instead of, 'wouldn't it be funny if?' Taylor explains. "How is this character relatable, even if you're going to Mars? It's not about whether someone has been to Mars, but have you lied on your resumé before? Have your ambitions led you to compromise the safety of a project?"

Taylor, MacNeill, Whalen and Aurora Browne are all veterans of Canadian comedy, with years of writing and performing experience, and took creating their own show seriously. Taylor conceived of the idea and pitched it to Frantic Films over two years ago. She knew what *Baroness von Sketch Show* was, and wasn't.

"You're not going to see us doing impersonations," Taylor says. "It's also not the politics of the day. We're small 'p' politics. We won't do movie parodies. We're not doing a commercial parody. We might skewer the world in which those forms exist, but we're not a sketch show that does that." After bringing MacNeill, Browne and Whalen on board, the quartet made a sizzle reel and shopped it around, not only to give network executives a feel for what *Baroness von Sketch Show* was about, but the writers' room too.

"It's harder, sometimes, to know what the tone is on the page," Whalen says. "Some people think it's about this one thing and somebody else can see the full vision. It was about hiring writers who really got the tone of the show and were in the batting zone and letting them do their thing." Writing and story editing on season two of *Baroness* was done by

From left: Aurora Browne; Carolyn Taylor; Jennifer Whalen; Meredith MacNeill

a variety of women from the sketch, standup and writing world, including award-winning author and poet Zoe Whittall (*The Best Kind of People*), author Monica Heisey (*I Can't Believe It's Not Better: A Woman's Guide to Coping with Life*), Jennifer Goodhue (*This Hour Has 22 Minutes*), standups Mae Martin, Elvira Kurt and Dawn Whitwell, Ann Pornel and Alex Tindal (*The Sketchersons*), playwright Donna-Michelle St. Bernard, Ify Chiwetelu, artist and writer Mariko Tamaki, Evany Rosen and Nelu Handa. As Whalen explains, successful comedy is written using a multitude of voices providing copious viewpoints and providing inspiration for others. One team member's strength may be writing jokes while another excels at putting together a scene; team them up and you've got a sketch.

Taylor serves as showrunner and head writer, listening to pitches on Monday mornings and deciding which make for potential sketches and setting aside those that don't. The former senior writer for CBC's *This Hour Has 22 Minutes* and YTV's *That's So Weird*, and Second City member, keeps everyone on track to ensure the series' voice is kept intact.

"We intensely worked out what the tone was, what the look was and the feel was," MacNeill, who was once part of the Royal Shakespeare Company, says. "We knew it so well that when we hit the writing room and were tossing ideas around they were staying within that framework."

That framework began on Monday mornings, when everyone got together to share weekend experiences. An argument with a partner or neighbour or — in the case of MacNeill, stepping on a nail and tearing her foot open — could lead to a sketch. Just the inkling of an idea or incident sparked something because the rest of the room riffed on that nugget and mined it for laughs.

"It's important to state that it is a very supportive thing," Whalen says. "I came in one day and said, 'Guys, I have this really funny riff on a eulogy. I don't have a beginning, a middle or an end.'

"In sketch, you've got two minutes to set up the world, have believable relationships, and ground it with something people know. It's really hard to do."

I felt comfortable enough to come in and say that. It's a really safe place."

By the end of Monday, sketches were assigned to individual writers, partnerships or groups. All day Tuesday and the following Wednesday mornings were devoted to writing and casting who would play what character. The first table read came on Wednesday afternoons when strong sketches were kept and weaker ones cut. But, no sketch was ever truly dead. Though, as Taylor says, nixed sketches on other television shows could never be brought back, passionate *Baroness* writers could keep their idea alive, perhaps as an ending to another scene or storing it to pitch in subsequent seasons. ("The week when you have nothing new to pitch, you go back in your file and say, 'Please God, let there be something funny in here,'" Whalen says.) They'll also, on the fly, jump in to help someone else.

Speaking to the cast, you can't help but come to the following conclusion: writing sketch comedy for television is *difficult*. They agree.

"I can honestly say sketch is a science," MacNeill admits. "You gotta break it down."

"I feel like it doesn't get the respect is deserves because with a television drama you've got an hour to tell a story, create the world, the characters and set up their motivations," Whalen says. "In sketch, you've got two minutes to set up the world, have believable relationships, and ground it with something people know. It's really hard to do."

"And you know *immediately* if you're failing," Browne says with a laugh.

Thursday mornings are used for rewrites, with a second table read in the afternoon; it's not uncommon for a sketch to go through up to nine revisions. Friday morning brings final revisions on the latest sketches and new blackouts (a quick, one-scene sketch to break up two settings or head into commercial). On Friday afternoons, Taylor, MacNeill, Whalen and Browne read through all of the sketches and put them in the following piles: Good to Go, Need Revision then Good to Go, Revise and Reread, and Limbo. Limbo is the step before dead, when the carcass can be picked over for a humorous line, character or premise. By end of day Friday, final notes are given to the writers.

Over 500 sketches were written for season two. After consulting with production, that number was trimmed to around 131. MacNeill says approximately 118 will be kept to build the upcoming season's seven episodes. Everyone was very aware of keeping sketches lean and mean — hence the number of rewrites — catching the viewer with a quick laugh before moving on. Conversely, some sketches were allowed to breathe and expand the world with more fleshed-out characters. But even then, it had to meet exacting demands.

"One of the rules for a longer sketch is to make sure the logic is there and the skeleton is there," Taylor says. "Can I follow the logic? Does the character's motivation make sense throughout? It can change, but is there logic to the scene? If the logic is sound, then we can improvise or embellish on the day when we're shooting."

Knowing where *Baroness von Sketch Show* was filmed was as important as knowing *what* the show's voice was. The quartet always knew on-location shoots were part of the series' DNA.

"I was on a sketch show in the U.K. that was 100 per cent location and we felt that that would really add to the show and make it relatable to be on location," MacNeill says. That meant guerrilla-style filming for season one across the Greater Toronto Area in such locations as Woodbine Racetrack, Queen St. West, Trinity Bellwoods Park, Dundas St., and Scarborough. They also had to make changes on the fly: a wedding chapel was converted into a massage parlour for one skit.

As for season two locations, a *Mad Max*-inspired sketch was filmed on a Toronto beach with the cast decked out as leather and studded monstrosities, a space-themed bit sees the troupe using a green screen, and a home in Roncesvalles Village was the site of the aforementioned period sketch.

"I'm less naked than I was last season," MacNeill reveals.

"Oh, and we got to go to Body Blitz Spa," Taylor says with a twinkle in her eye. ■

Writing and acting the part

By Katherine Brodsky

Amanda Joy is an actor who realized that there was no reason why she couldn't also write projects for herself, instead of waiting for them. One positive response led to another, and soon she was being hired to both write and act. Her sitcom about two second-generation millennials of Asian descent, *Second Jen* — in which she also co-stars, debuted last month on CityTV.

Were you always writing?
I always wrote. Even as a kid. Most of seventh grade, I failed, because I was sitting in class, writing really terrible fantasy novels in my little teddy bear notebook. I think what I like about it, is creating worlds.

What's the first thing you got hired to write?
I remember on one set, I was doing some improv, they were laughing and the producer asked if I had a spec script. I didn't even know what that was. So I Googled what it was, and then wrote one up in like a week and sent it to them.

It was a spec script for *Bob's Burgers*. Which was so dumb because it's a 60-page cartoon adult sit-com and no one in their right mind would do that. But I didn't really understand, I'm like, "I like the show." So I wrote a spec script for it.

What was the first thing that actually got produced?
Well the first thing, I produced myself back in the golden age of YouTube, when you could go out into the woods with a camcorder and actually get an audience. So I did a five-part web series fresh out of high school. A while later I wrote a pilot that I co-produced with Samantha Wan and that is what eventually became the show *Second Jen*.

You often act in the shows that you write...
You know, I actually think of acting and writing as being really similar. In both disciplines, you're telling stories and I think my instincts and my passion has always been for storytelling. As an actor, you have a really good understanding of how people work, their psychology, and their motivations. And then, when you're a screenwriter, you have a better sense of the overall picture. So the two disciplines coming together actually works really well.

When you write, do you have yourself in mind to act in it?
I mean, why not. [laughs] You know, for a long time I was actually always writing myself as the side character because I like to give somebody else a chance to interpret the protagonist. In recent years though, I've been writing myself into bigger parts. I think as my skill as a screenwriter becomes more advanced, I'm getting better at writing a bigger variety of characters, and so I write characters that are interesting to me, not only as somebody who would watch a program, but also as an actor. So I like to play bigger parts now, because I trust myself more to be able to interpret the characters in an original way that serves the overall story.

What do you hope to do as a writer?
Despite being a comedy writer, a lot of things I've experienced have been very difficult, and I feel like I'm not alone in that. And not all experiences — especially for women of colour — are necessarily treated with respect in creative industries and in narrative film and media. I like being able to tell these stories with respect and with truth so that people don't feel as alone as I've felt sometimes. I also like the idea of visibility, of creating work for my peers who don't necessarily get as much exposure because of the colour of their skin or because they're heavier or disabled or older, etc. I want to be part of a change to push for a more accurate reflection of society. ■

Unfair Engagers

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

All I Want Productions Inc.
Principal: Kirk Shaw

Battered Productions Inc.
Principal: Kirk Shaw

Christmas Town Productions Inc.
Principal: Kirk Shaw

FOTP Productions Inc.
Principal: Richard Rapkowski

Guardian Films Inc./
En Garge Films Inc.
Principal: Kirk Shaw

H & S Films
Principal: Nicolas Stiliadis

Hiding Productions Inc.
Principal: Kirk Shaw

High Seas Rescue Productions Inc.
Principal: F. Whitman Trecartin

Ice Planet (1) Canada Ltd.
Principal: Philip Jackson

Justice Productions Inc.
Principal: Kirk Shaw

Kangaroo Court Productions Ltd.
Principal: Robin Payne

Les Productions les Plus Belles Routes du Monde Inc.
Principal: Andre Belanger
(not affiliated with Spectra Animation Inc.)

Lester Beach Entertainment
Principal: Jeff Lester

Mikisew Keemiwan Productions, Ltd.
Principal: Norman Champagne

Nikolai Productions
Principal: Cindy Lamb

Norfolk International Ltd.
Principal: William Macadam

Numb Productions Inc.
Principal: Kirk Shaw

Perfect Stranger Productions Inc.
Principal: Kirk Shaw

Prospero Entertainment Group Inc.
Principal: John Lambert

Richard Lowry Productions Inc.
Principal: Richard Lowry

She Productions Inc.
Principal: Kirk Shaw

Spiritual Productions Inc.
Principal: Kirk Shaw

System Productions Inc.
Principal: Kirk Shaw

T Man Productions Inc.
Principal: Kirk Shaw

Zolar Productions Inc.
Principal: Kirk Shaw

Please Help Us Find These Writers!

The CSCS is holding foreign secondary authors' levies for writers

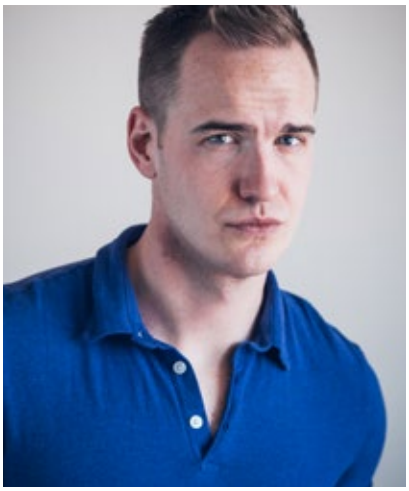
The Canadian Screenwriters Collection Society (CSCS) is holding foreign secondary authors' levies for a number of writers and uncredited productions. As CSCS does not have a current address for these writers or the productions do not have complete credit information we have not been able to forward any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

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

Marisa King at **m.king@wgc.ca**
or call (416) 979.7907 ext. 5231 or
1.800.567.9974 ext. 5231.

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

CSCS
CANADIAN SCREENWRITERS COLLECTION SOCIETY



More than a horror show

By Cameron Archer

The 2013 horror film *Torment* saw the feature film writing debut of Thomas Pound, who co-wrote the film with Michael Foster and served as one of its executive producers. From there, Pound joined the second season of Foundation Features/Lark Productions' *Motive* as junior story editor, becoming story editor for its third season. Pound recently worked on Muse Entertainment/Back Alley Film Productions' *Bellevue*, an eight-part serialized procedural drama currently earmarked for CBC's winter 2017 schedule. Continuing to hone his talents in the procedural genre, Pound co-produces and is part of the second-season writing team on Entertainment One/Piller Segan/Jason Priestley vehicle *Private Eyes*, currently in production for Global/Corus Entertainment.

How does the creative process for shows on CBC Television compare to shows on a private broadcaster (i.e., Bell Media and Corus)?

The creative process itself is always the same, regardless of the broadcaster. Stories are born, nurtured, and developed with a team of talented minds. The difference on the level of a broadcaster's involvement, specifically CBC, is more of my own awareness that this particular story will be distributed across the most Canadian-specific network. It's a matter of tapping into each network's needs. At the end of the day, regardless of a smaller or larger business model, from executives to script coordinators, we're all Canadians trying to tell compelling stories.

What challenges exist in writing about transgender issues on* Bellevue*? Canadian television doesn't typically focus on topics of interest to the transgender community.

Bellevue, being one of the few shows to delve into stories in the transgender community, comes with a tremendous responsibility to treat it with respect, honesty, and authenticity. Everyone on the team consistently strives to work harder and dig deeper with these stories. It's always a challenge to write about a world you are not a part of, but this challenge demanded a deeper understanding of the transgender community, through consultants and every bit of research available. Canadian television doesn't normally focus on these kinds of topics, but perhaps after seeing what a beautiful job creator Jane Maggs did with *Bellevue*, that pattern will shift.

How do you work to avoid formulaic tendencies on procedural dramas in Canada? Bellevue is the first show you've written for with a serialized format, while Private Eyes is more lighthearted than other series you've worked on.

Part of the joy in working on a procedural drama is learning the engrained story structure of the particular show, and then trying to push yourself to take the episode in directions even the most avid fan wouldn't see coming. In a way, you're working in a specific box. The creative challenge becomes trying to convince the audience that the box is actually a circle. Ultimately, the way you avoid formulaic tendencies on a procedural series is the same as on a serialized show, by creating characters an audience doesn't expect to see. Compelling human drama will pull viewers in regardless if it's a case of the week or a season-long mystery. With a series like *Bellevue*, we have an entire season to delve into the complex layers of an ensemble. On a procedural like *Private Eyes*, we have to bring in guest characters quickly and peel back tiny layers of our main characters. We want the main arcs to evolve much more gradually, ideally over years, which I find much closer to how we evolve in real life. ■

News from WGC Members

Carolyn Hay just finished co-editing (with Andrew Sabiston) 52 episodes of *Ranger Rob* for Corus/Treehouse. She also has been commissioned to write a new musical for the Stratford Festival and is workshopping it at Stratford this fall.

Naledi Jackson recently received the Harold Greenberg Fund's shorts-to-features grant for her film, *The Drop In*, which she is writing and directing. The project is being produced by Priscilla Galvez, and stars Olunike Adeliyi and Mouna Traoré.

Larry Raskin is showrunning the first season of *ReBoot: The Guardian Code*, a live-action/CG animated half-hour series for Mainframe Entertainment and YTV.

Aaron Gingrich received an award for Best Animated Short/Show at the first-ever Festival International sur Film le Handicap (International Festival for Films about Disabilities) in Cannes. *The Very Very Special Show* was voiced by children with developmental disabilities and co-written and "joke" influenced by them as well.

Jeff Biederman just finished showrunning *Second Jen*, a comedy series for Rogers created by **Samantha Wan** & **Amanda Joy** that began running in October on City. His children are suitably unimpressed.

Louise Moon's writing career is going to the dogs as she writes for season four of the very "pup-ular" Spin Master/Guru Studio animated preschool series, *Paw Patrol*, airing on TVOKids, Knowledge Network, and Nickelodeon.

Julie Kim and **Kariné Marwood** wrote *Joseph and Mary*, a biblical story following Joseph, Mary and Jesus up to the age of 12. The screenplay was presold at TIFF in 2015, shot entirely in North Bay by Sugar Shack Productions, and was released on DVD in the U.S. in July 2016. The Canadian release is in Nov. 2016 (to be aired on a Shaw channel in December).

Writer/Director **Jill Sharpe**'s *Robert Lantos: a meta-narrative abridged* is a collage-like celebration where memory, dream, and story collide in a flickering state of imagination. Scenes from Lantos' landmark films are playfully re-purposed to underscore his motivation to produce films.

Mary Lewis was the winner of a pitch competition as well as a feature script competition held by the Atlantic Film Festival. The prize, sponsored by the Harold Greenberg Fund, is $10,000.

Noel Baker wrote six of eight one-hour episodes for season two of A&E/History Canada's true-crime biker drama, *Gangland Undercover*, airing Mondays on History Canada.

David Schmidt is expanding his medical knowledge writing for season 12 of *Untold Stories of the ER*, airing on Discovery and TLC. This is David's fifth season writing for the series; next year he gets pre-approved for med school.

Ryan W. Smith's feature screenplay *Jacaranda* — about a young freedom fighter in 1980s South Africa — has been honoured as a 2016 Austin Film Festival semi-finalist.

Robert J. Sawyer was named a Member of the Order of Canada "for his accomplishments as a science-fiction writer and mentor and for his contributions as a futurist."

Now wrapping up a fourth successful season as story editor of *Doki* (Portfolio Entertainment), **Karen Moonah** is enjoying some development work while planning her next adventure.

Tom Mason has wrapped on Guru's *True and the Rainbow Kingdom*, has two new series in development, and is packaging two graphic novels for Scholastic Books. He continues to co-write the Captain Awesome books for Simon & Schuster.

Edward Kay's debut crime novel, *At Rope's End*, will be released in the U.S. and Canada by NYC-based Crooked Lane Books on Jan. 10, 2017. Television rights have been optioned by Seven 24 Films (*Wynonna Earp, Heartland*).

Jennica Harper attended the 2016 Banff Media Festival as part of the Corus Entertainment Drama & Comedy Showrunner Training Program. She's currently a writer and Co-EP on season two of *Cardinal* (CTV).

Celine La Freniere was invited to the University of Turin, Italy, to teach the screenwriting adaptation of her novel, *Glaston Town*. Her new novel is set in Québec in the late 1960's. ■

SHARON RIIS
1947-2016

By Anne Wheeler

On May 20, 2016 Sharon Riis died privately, in the way that she chose. She didn't say 'good-bye' but her sharp uncompromised voice is evident in everything she wrote.

"I'm solid yuppie material now, Mrs. Middle Class. But essentially I'm small-town working-class. There's that inarticulate level where I come from and only in that voice can I make my ideas sing."

-SR

Her first novel, *The True Story of Ida Johnson*, (1976), was astonishing, provoking excited reviews and winning the Books in Canada First Novel Award. The setting was southern Alberta. Accolades from the likes of Margaret Atwood and Marion Engle followed and a play, produced by Passe Muraille, took it to the stage.

"Ida is this low-rent white trash kind of lumpenproletariat woman, who clouds over puberty and responds to life as though all you can do is react to it. She gets knocked up, she gets married, she lives in a trailer ...she feels as though she has no choices at all and she can't shape her own life ...There's a holiness attached to motherhood and yet for all of us there are moments ...when your six week old baby who has had colic for five weeks almost gets thrown out the window. The urge is enormous. Ida gives voice to those impulses and allows all of us to acknowledge them."

-SR

Her second book, *Midnight Twilight Tourist Zone*, was just as risky — experimenting with time and reality, traveling beyond death. It spawned a feature, *Latitude 55* and launched her into screenwriting. Working with John Julianni, she quickly adapted and was nominated for a Genie.

My collaboration with Sharon began with *A Change of Heart* and then, *Loyalties*, a psycho-thriller set in the north, pivoting on a friendship between Rosanne, a Metis, and Lily, a newly-landed Brit. The duo reflected two facets of Sharon; the "bush lady" and the "intellectual." She always "rolled her own" and could "out curse" anyone but she also appreciated a good martini and drove a Jaguar. Features with two female leads were so rare, the distributors refused to put two women on the poster. It was nominated for a Genie.

Sharon was a terrific storyteller and natural comedian — surprising and painfully perceptive. All of her dramas were driven by harsh realities laced with dark humour. *The Wake* told a tragic story of young natives and the RCMP (Gemini winner). *Revenge of the Land* was about the greed and exploitation during the building of the railway. *Savage Messiah* profiled a maniacal cult leader and his abused female followers (Genie winner).

Her passion for strong, truthful writing also made her a valued story-editor and mentor. Never unkind, she cut quickly to heart of a problem, and inspired her students to dig deeper.

During the last several years of her career she got caught up in writing scripts — wonderful stories — that got re-written over and over but never produced. She lost heart and quit writing altogether.

Refusing to service the appetite for "marketable" MOWs, she moved to Mexico, frustrated and disappointed in the shift of what was getting made. She was a storyteller fuelled by conviction and could not write contrary to her voice.

In the end, her body, a type 1 "brittle" diabetic from the age of 13, played a huge part in abandoning her spirit. She rarely spoke about her neuropathic pain and the anxiety she endured to the end.

With great strength of character, Sharon called her last shots. She passed on with an empty martini glass on her bed-side table and her beloved Chiquita cuddled in her arms. Chiquita was a Xoloitzcuitli — an ancient Mexican breed of dogs — guardians of their master's souls, able to guide them through the world of death.

Loved and respected by many, Sharon was known by few. She began her first novel with the simple statement: "The truth of the matter is, there isn't any." ■

Welcome

Seneca Aaron Toronto ON
Rachel Anthony London U.K.
Andree Bagosy Toronto ON
Aaron Bala Toronto ON
Rachel Borders West Hollywood CA
Ashley Botting Toronto ON
Adam Bradley Toronto ON
Celeste Bronfman Toronto ON
J. Adam Brown Toronto ON
Anthony Scott Burns Toronto ON
Joel Buxton Toronto ON
Tim Carter Vancouver BC
Katerina Cizek Toronto ON
Kim Clements Los Angeles CA
Marie Clements Vancouver BC
Cynthia J. Cohen North Hollywood CA
Mika Collins Toronto ON
David Cornue Burbank CA
Carly DeNure Toronto ON
Hugh Dillon Toronto ON
Karl DiPelino Toronto ON
Emma Donoghue London ON
Jacob Duarte Spiel Toronto ON
Andrew Emerson Walmer Kent U.K.
Helen Farrall Manchester U.K.
Luke Gordon Field Toronto ON
Bill Fuller Redondo Beach CA
Jocelyn Geddie Toronto ON
Anthony Grant Winnipeg MB
Mark Greig Brighton U.K.
Rebecca Hales Toronto ON
Jordan Hall Vancouver BC
Ben Harris London U.K.
Matt Hogue Toronto ON
Joel Hynes Toronto ON
Darren Jones London U.K.
Ken Kabatoff North Vancouver BC
Miranda Larson Northamptonshire U.K.
Alan Levy Studio City CA
Vivian Lin Toronto ON
Renee MacCarthy Toronto ON
David Maples Los Angeles CA
Sindy McKay Oxnard CA
Thomas Michael Gatineau QC
Susan Morris Studio City CA
Tristin Morton Vancouver BC
Gillian Muller Toronto ON
Andrew Mullins Toronto ON
Ann Pornel Toronto ON
Catherine Reitman Toronto ON
Michael Ryan Burbank CA
Alexander Saxton Toronto ON
Benjamin Schiffer London U.K.
Nancey Silvers Manhattan Beach CA
Hayden Simpson Toronto ON
Patrick Sisam Toronto ON
Jennifer Skelly Los Angeles CA
Ryan Spencer Toronto ON
Jocelyn Stevenson London U.K.
Michael Stewart Ottawa ON
Patty Sullivan Toronto ON
Terri Tatchell Beverly Hills CA
James H. Thomas Burbank CA
John Tinker Clermont GA
Nick Torokvei Sherman Oaks CA
Stephanie Tracey Toronto ON
Moira Walley-Beckett West Hollywood CA
Daniel Weissenberger Ottawa ON

Our condolences

Chris Clark Toronto ON
Martin Lavut Toronto ON
Sharon Riis Victoria BC

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 Aaron Unrau at a.unrau@wgc.ca
1-800-567-9975 ext. 5270

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

NFB - contact Aaron Unrau at a.unrau@wgc.ca
1-800-567-9975 ext. 5270

Laszlo Gefin — *Revolution's Orphans*
Janos Szanyi — *Revolution's Orphans*
Gilles Toupin — *Cycling: Still the Greatest*
Peter Vogler — *Ernie's Idea*

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PLEASE INDICATE YOUR CHOICE OF CATEGORY:

★ BEST SCRIPT from a ROOKIE SERIES ★
★ CHILDREN'S ★
★ DOCUMENTARY ★
★ FEATURE FILM ★
★ MOW & MINISERIES ★
★ SHORTS & WEBSERIES ★
★ TV COMEDY ★
★ TWEENS & TEENS ★

Judges must be WGC members, and may only judge categories in which they are not entered.

TO APPLY, EMAIL awards@wgc.ca WITH THE SUBJECT: "WGC AWARDS JUDGES."

Alice in CanCon Consultation-land

By Laurie Channer

There was a table set out under a tree, and all manner of characters were seated around it, having afternoon tea. "Lots of room!" they cried when they saw Alice coming in her ink-stained pinafore. "Everyone can come to the table!"

"Am I late?" Alice asked. "I was up all night writing." She pulled up a seat. "Goodness, my chair appears to be lower all than the others."

"It's exactly 6/10 as high," said the Mad Hatter. "I produced it myself, to my own specifications. It increases flexibility, you know."

Alice didn't think so. In fact, it reminded her that in her travels, while she had yet to find the potion to make her larger and more powerful, she *had* found a lot of notes that said "Eat Me."

"Have some wine!" said the March Hare. "Everything's on the table!"

Alice looked at the spread of cakes and cookies and cups and saucers. "Let's all have some of that OTT-tea."

"OTT-tea is not on the table," said the Mad Hatter.

"Then you should say what you mean!" Alice cried. "I thought *everything* was on the table."

"Everything *is* on the table!" the others chorused, and laughed at Alice's indignation.

Alice noticed a flamingo at the end of the table. "I'm sure you don't belong in this scene."

The flamingo nodded agreement. "I know, but a network executive added me in. All network executives move one place!" the flamingo called out.

"But if everyone just moves over, how do any fresh ideas get into the system?" Alice asked. The others ignored her and broke into a chorus of "Twinkle Twinkle American Stars," which woke up the Dormouse.

"I know you," the Dormouse said sleepily to Alice. "I saw your *Murdoch* episode in a hotel room in Singapore."

"He's having a bad dream," the Mad Hatter said, stuffing the Dormouse into a teapot. "Our shows have no international success at all."

"Justin the Cheshire Cat said his government valued culture and we'd get more funding," said Alice. "Look, I got a selfie with him!" She pulled out her phone and frowned at it. "Hmm, there seems to be nothing left in this photo but his smile."

"Like White Queen Joly says," the Mad Hatter replied. "It's jam to-morrow and jam yesterday — but never jam to-day."

"But I haven't had jam since the CRTC decision of 1999," said Alice.

The Dormouse stuck his head out of the teapot, with the lid resting between his ears like a fanciful hat. "Are you a Dodo?" he asked Alice.

"At this rate, I soon will be," replied Alice.

Alice's chair began to move oddly beneath her. She looked down to realize that she was sitting on a gray, stuffed donkey with a mournful face. "I'm very sorry," she said. "Who are you?"

"I'm Eeyore," said Eeyore. "I expect I've wandered into the wrong story. But I feel like we're going to have a lot in common." ■

ILLUSTRATION: JOHN TENNIEL/SHUTTERSTOCK

November

8 - 19 — **Reel Asian Film Festival** reelasian.com

10 - 20 — **Montreal International Documentary Festival** ridm.qc.ca/en

22 — **Writers Talking TV** wgc.ca

25 — **Department of Canadian Heritage "Canadian Content in a Digital World" public consultations close** canada.ca

30 - Dec. 4 — **Whistler Film Festival** whistlerfilmfestival.com

December

2 — *Deadline* — **WGC Screenwriting Awards nominations** wgc.ca

February

1 - 3 — **Prime Time in Ottawa** primetimeinottawa.ca

9 — **Writers Talking TV** wgc.ca

March

12 — **Canadian Screen Awards Broadcast Gala, CBC** academy.ca

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Deadline: Dec. 2, 2016, 11:59 p.m. EST