

CANADIAN SCREENWRITER

CANADA \$7 FALL 2017 VOL.20, NO.1

FILM | TELEVISION | RADIO | DIGITAL MEDIA

22 Minutes At 25 Years

CRTC, PNI, And
A WGC Victory

Edward Kay Touts
Girl-Powered
Addison

Sarah Polley's *Alias Grace*

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Contents

Cover 6

Alias Grace: From Dream To Reality

The six-part miniseries premiered on CBC in September to
widespread accolades for its ambitious take on
Margaret Atwood's period novel. For Sarah Polley, it was
about realizing a decades-long fantasy to adapt the work.
And to get the nod, timing was everything.
By Matthew Hays

Features 12

25 Years Of 22 Minutes

We celebrate the success and longevity of Canada's
ground-breaking political comedy show.
By Joanie Veitch

**Edward Kay's Animated
Comical Brain Teaser** 18

Addison, the title character in the kids' cartoon series,
is a six-year-old girl who solves mysteries while inventing
gadgets to meet any challenges that may crop up.
By Diane Wild

CRTC, PNI, And A WGC Victory 22

What could have been a much darker autumn for Canadian
screenwriters was made brighter by the hard work of the
members and staff of the Writers Guild of Canada.
By Matthew Hays

W-Files

Julian Doucet — By Cameron Archer 25
Shebli Zarghami — By Greg David 27

Columns

From the Editor/Contributors 2
Inside/Out — Jill Golick 3
One Last Thing — Ian MacIntyre 32

News

Beat Sheet 4
Spotlight 28
Money for Missing Writers 30
New Members 31





Timing key to more than just comedy

Timing. It's the key to success (a lot of the time).

Remember SixDegrees.com? It was a social network that showed up on the nascent web in 1997. Based on the game, Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon, it was a way for people to connect. And while it did see moderate growth, it petered out. People weren't ready for that level of social connectedness — they had to grow into it.

Sarah Polley's timing may have been serendipitous but it made a difference.

Polley wanted to bring a book she cherished (Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace*) to the screen. When she thought about adapting the novel to the big screen, she realized she was looking at a miniseries.

When she finally was ready to pitch her idea, miniseries had come back into vogue and audiences were ready for them.

Not every screenwriter has the background Polley does. She knows the industry from behind and in front of the camera.

There's no way Polley could have predicted the increased profile of feminist issues in the news over the last few years.

And she has a miniseries addressing serious issues about the treatment of women, with a historical perspective.

Not all of it is timing — but timing mattered for that production.

And where is timing *always* important? Comedy.

Politics as fodder for comedy was seen in early Canadian television like *This Hour Has Seven Days*, where regular comedy segments were part of the show. For a similarly named show, the timing was even more right — *This Hour Has 22 Minutes* celebrates a quarter century on the air this year. For 25 years, *22 Minutes* has been keeping politicians on their toes and Canadians laughing.

The string of writers who have worked on the show reveals the depth of the talent pool in this country.

I mean it seems like the WGC has an astonishing number of very funny members — it's a really long list.

And the politicians, topics, and absolute gold they've captured, well, it's astounding. George W. Bush looked just a tad foolish commenting to Rick Mercer about Canadian Prime Minister Jean Poutine in a delicious bit of fun. And if you think they only went after right-wing politicians, recall a more recent gag with Mark Critch producing a joint from his pocket in front of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and asking him where it could be sparked up.

22 Minutes sets a bar for political satire. It follows a tradition that has been around in Canada much longer than television, and includes work by Stephen Leacock. Canada has had the talent kicking around to do *22 Minutes* for decades. And hopefully the timing will be right for many more years.

— Tom Villemaire

Fall 2017

Joanie Veitch is a freelance writer and editor living on the east coast. She has just recently discovered the joy of writing short poems on her iPhone while waiting for the next thing to happen.

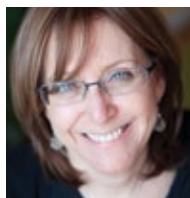
Ian MacIntyre has written for *Degrassi: Next Class*, *The Beaverton*, *Inspector Gadget*, and he's pretty sure any day the WGC is going to ask for their award back.

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.

Cameron Archer runs the Canadian television/media website *Gloryosky* (gloryosky.ca), and is also a freelance arts and media writer. He lives in Eastern Ontario.

Diane Wild is a Vancouver-based writer, editor and health care communicator who founded the *TV, eh?* website and gallivants to work on the Olympics every couple of years.

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.com, a website devoted to covering the Canadian television industry.



Guild assumes a stronger position

A few months ago, I was in mourning. It had been a horrible year for Canadian screenwriters with money evaporating from the system, horrendous CRTC decisions, almost no development and many writers venturing across the border to seek opportunity in L.A.'s exploding market.

Fast forward to early October, to find me boasting to a crowd of international writers about our new lease on life. At the International Affiliation of Writers Guilds, I regaled my peers with what sounded like pure fiction. "Our Minister of Heritage mentioned showrunners in her speech. She talked about the importance of early script development."

In many countries, screenwriters are struggling. Not a single guild at the IAWG feels that their government is supportive of their work and their industry. They gathered round to hear me gloat about the broad strokes of Creative Canada, the vision for cultural industries unveiled in September.

TV is by no means the only industry suffering the effects of disruption. No one came to the aid of taxi drivers when Uber entered the market. No one stepped in to help the book industry from Amazon. So it is remarkable that the Canadian media industry has been promised stable funding so we can find our footing in this new world order. Not just production funding, the new policy provides financial support to go out to world markets to develop new partnerships, business models, and revenue streams.

More than that, we will have funding for early stage development. Is there a government official anywhere else in the world who knows what this is? Our government has

recognized that these initial stages of writing work constitute the development of the intellectual property that underlies a profitable domestic industry. They are ready to invest.

What the Israeli, French, and Australian writers really want to hear about is the Netflix deal. I confirm that Netflix will invest half a billion in Canadian production over five years. What about the rules, they ask. Is it real Canadian production? They're screenwriters and they share my belief that to be a truly national show it must be written by those who live on the soil and pay the taxes.

Outside of U.S. almost every television industry — including Canada's — has survived under regulatory systems that protect and promote national culture. But in the era of disruption can these systems hold? Disruptors, like Netflix, Amazon, Facebook, Google, Hulu and others do not have bricks and mortar in any of these countries. How can any government regulate them, let alone force them to pay taxes? Many of them don't collect or pay sales taxes in the U.S.

That is why I see the Netflix investment in Canada as brilliant. Instead of trying to force this new player to fit into a system that may no longer be sustainable, our government has brought them to the table. All the details of the deal haven't yet emerged, but Netflix personnel will be on the ground on our home turf. We can meet them at parties and go to their offices to pitch our projects. I believe in Canadian writers and our product. I think we will be able to convince them to work with us even in the absence of regulations.

Then I look over at Mathieu Plante, the president of Sartec,

the guild that represents Quebec's French writers. He is as worried about the future of the francophone industry as I was for the anglo industry a few short weeks ago. How will the Netflix deal help his members? Sartec's writers make great shows that local audiences love. I think audiences around the world will love them too. The global market is big enough for Quebec's exports to find their place. I believe in Canada's francophone product as strongly as I believe in the anglo product.

But one giddy optimistic opinion is small comfort to Mathieu. He must fight for the survival of Sartec's members and the Quebec culture. The same is true for every writer-president of every guild around the world, with one exception (two if you count the WGAE and WGAW as separate entities). The American product is being streamed onto our screens and the dollars that support local cultures are bleeding out of our countries. This is more than a fight for work for writers. It is a battle for the survival of languages and cultures.

I do not have a solution. I am quite sure the old system will not survive. Until we figure out a new model the members the WGC have three things going for us: the ability to write in English, the only government in the world responding to disruption by taking first steps to save the TV industry, and the friendship and solidarity of writers around the world. We are facing a threat that only international cooperation will solve. Our position of relative power and privilege will be essential in the fight for global cultural diversity.

— **Jill Golick**

The WGC Policy Decoder

Heritage announces “Creative Canada”

The News: Minister of Canadian Heritage Mélanie Joly announced a much-anticipated vision for Canadian culture in a digital age on Sept. 28, called Creative Canada. At the centre of the announcement was a negotiated agreement with U.S. streaming giant Netflix to commit to invest a minimum of \$500 million in new money that is for original Canadian production over the next five years. In addition, the government said it would increase the federal contribution to the Canada Media Fund (CMF) to maintain the level of funding in the CMF starting next year, invest \$125 million over five years in a “Creative Export Strategy,” and launch a review of the Broadcasting Act and the Telecommunications Act.

WGC Analysis in Brief: While there are many details still to be revealed, the WGC believes that Creative Canada represents a largely positive first step towards a national cultural policy for the digital age. One hundred million in annual spending compares favourably with the spending on programs of national interest (PNI) by the Bell Media and Corus Entertainment “designated groups” under CRTC regulatory policy. PNI consists primarily of drama, comedy, animation, and long-form documentary programming. This is the type of programming that Netflix typically commissions, and spending on PNI by Bell and Corus is also in the \$100 million range for each.

Of course, questions remain about both the Netflix agreement and the larger Creative Canada policy framework. The agreement was negotiated under the Investment Canada Act, not the Broadcasting Act. Will Netflix substantially spend on Canadian-written,



From left: Screenwriters Cynthia Knight and Jacob Tierney, Heritage Minister Mélanie Joly, WGC President Jill Golick, WGC Executive Director Maureen Parker, WGC Director of Policy Neal McDougall

10-out-of-10-point production, or rely more on lower-point production? And what happens after the five years of this deal?

The WGC will be exploring these questions and more with the Minister and the federal government over the coming weeks, months, and for the duration of the agreement. The Guild will watch how all this unfolds closely and continue to support the use of the regulatory power of the government and/or the CRTC if and when it becomes necessary. The WGC still firmly believes that broadcasters operating in Canada, both traditional and digital, have an obligation to contribute to Canadian cultural production and support Canadian content.

Looking Ahead: The Minister’s announcement referred to further important events to come. Likely the most significant for WGC members is the review of the Broadcasting Act and the Telecommunications Act. It is the Broadcasting Act that grants the CRTC the power and obligation to regulate broadcasting in Canada in the public interest, which

includes Canadian programming requirements for broadcasters and contributions to the CMF by cable and satellite TV providers. It will be crucial that Canada retains the ability to regulate its broadcasting system, including those components of it that exist online. As we monitor the outcomes of the Netflix deal, the WGC will prepare for this very important next step in developing Canada’s digital strategy.

Heritage Meets WGC Screenwriters

In June the WGC met with Minister of Canadian Heritage Mélanie Joly to talk about significant issues faced by Canadian screenwriters. Screenwriters Cynthia Knight (*Mohawk Girls*), Jacob Tierney (*Letterkenny*), WGC President Jill Golick (*Ruby Skye P.I.*), Executive Director Maureen Parker, and Director of Policy Neal McDougall, joined Minister Joly and staff in Ottawa for a wide-ranging conversation. It was a good opportunity for the Guild to meet the minister in person, and for her to learn more about Canadian screenwriters.

From left: Neal McDougall,
Kurt Smeaton, Matt
Kippen, Nadiya Chettiar,
Liberal MP Julie Dabrusin,
Kevin White, Ins Choi,
Amelia Haller, Anita
Kapila, Carly Stone



Simon Racioppa joins WGC council

A warm welcome to Simon Racioppa, who has joined the WGC council. Simon is a multiple award-winning screenwriter, and the co-creator of *Spliced!*, as well as co-founder, with Richard Elliott, of Reptile Films. Simon also sits on the *Canadian Screenwriter* magazine editorial committee, and has volunteered his time to the WGC in numerous other ways. You can find out more about Simon at his website, and also by watching the WGC's animated video set to Simon's own words describing how he became a Canadian screenwriter. You'll find it on the WGC's YouTube channel: www.youtube.com/user/Writersguildofcanada

In the Writers' Rooms

The WGC has visited the writers' rooms of a number of shows since the last edition of *Canadian Screenwriter* was published, including *The Next Step*, *Workin' Moms*,

Travelers, *The Detail*, and *Frankie Drake*. Thanks to the showrunners and screenwriters of those rooms for welcoming WGC staff and participating in lively discussions about issues facing Canadian screenwriters. Also on the writers' room front, the WGC was pleased to facilitate a meeting between Liberal MP Julie Dabrusin and the *Kim's Convenience* room. Ms. Dabrusin is one of a number of MPs to take an active interest in the work of Canadian screenwriters through meeting with WGC members. She also sponsored the House of Commons e-petition to the Minister of Canadian Heritage asking for the CRTC's decision on broadcasting licence renewals be sent back to the CRTC, a petition that is, at time of writing, in the top 20 (of all time) most signed House of Commons e-petitions.

Writers Talking TV

The WGC's Writers Talking TV series continues, with a full house for this autumn's *Kim's Convenience* co-showrunners Ins Choi and Kevin White, hosted by Jeff Biederman. Coming up this fall,

WTTV in Vancouver on Nov. 18, with *Travelers* showrunner Brad Wright, hosted by Sarah Dodd. And don't forget that Writers Talking TV events are available as podcasts on the WGC website.

David Widdicombe (1962-2017)

The WGC was very sorry to learn of the passing of David Widdicombe, a screenwriter, playwright, and director. David's career began with writing radio plays for the CBC, and he went on to become a Dora Mavor Moore Award-nominated playwright for his play *Science Fiction*, as well as writing the multiple-award winning film, *Santa Baby*. But not only was David an accomplished writer, he also had such regard for the Writers Guild of Canada that in his will he asked his WGC membership be paid following his death. While our payments system isn't able to accommodate that wish, the WGC takes this opportunity to publicly thank David for such a generous and meaningful gesture. ■



GREAT ADAPTATION

By Matthew Hays

Sarah Polley talks about *Alias Grace*, the golden age of TV, and the long hours when in production

When asked about her first encounter with *Alias Grace*, Margaret Atwood's period novel that was first published in 1996, Sarah Polley says her most powerful memory is of furniture.

"I think I was 17 at the time, and I remember the couch I was sitting on so well, because I don't think I moved from that couch until the book was finished. And that was a few days, because I'm a slow reader."

Polley, the Toronto-based Oscar-nominated screenwriter, actor, and director, has long-entertained visions of adapting the celebrated novel, which tells the story of a 19th-century maid who may or may not have murdered her employer, airing this fall on the CBC and Netflix in November. "The book really got under my skin," Polley recalls. "I do wonder why it affected me so deeply. I got lost in that world and loved learning about that period in Canadian history. I loved the questions it forced me to ask."

Polley says the resonance also had to do with her own activism at the time. "I was pretty much spending most of my time as a political activist. I was learning so much about this point in history, and that we'd actually had a rebellion in this country. Instinctually, I was seeing every frame of it. It was naturally something I wanted to adapt."

Getting \$30 million for a miniseries of this scope and ambition is pretty epic in itself, and Polley concedes it's been a long path and there were different visions of what it was to be along the way. "When I first started to see it as a feature, it was really daunting. I realized I was probably going to have to lose many of the parts I loved the most. There was something so depressing about that — the context, the political stuff, was all going to have to go away if it were feature-length. When I finally decided to make it into a miniseries, we had entered into the golden age of TV, but the miniseries still hadn't come back."

“Screenwriting had already been my main passion”

Thus *Alias Grace*, and the people behind it, benefitted from what can perhaps best be described as *formal* timing — the series is presented as its form is welcomed by both broadcasters and audiences. “My agent said just four or five years ago that there were limited places to pitch a miniseries. But TV has now made room for a show like this.”

When Polley spoke to *Canadian Screenwriter* about the process of adapting Alice Munro’s short story into the film *Away from Her*, in 2007, she described the process as “fantastic and liberating.” She laughs when I bring up the quote. “This was much more challenging. I would not use the words ‘fantastic’ and ‘liberating.’ It’s a hard novel to keep track of as a reader or screenwriter. Throughout production I had to remind myself of what version belonged to whom, what time frame we were in. It’s a story that takes place in several time frames, with many different versions of the same stories. The closest thing I can compare it to is *Stories We Tell* [Polley’s feature-length 2012 documentary, about her own complicated family life], where it was just really hard to keep track of the threads. You’re dealing with multiple versions of the same story, the ephemeral nature of the truth. That’s really hard to write about in a way that’s linear and clear.”

But Polley says the biggest game changer in terms of her writing process is having two small children. “I’m always frustrated when I read writers talking about their process. None of people’s processes allow for children. Joan Didion talks about getting up, going for a walk, doing some more writing, then you have dinner, then another walk, then more writing. None of this makes any sense to anyone who has children, and I think it probably makes people who have children feel like they can’t write. The truth is, there’s no waiting for inspiration when you have children. There’s the hour you seize upon when someone is sleeping. There’s what you can get done if you’re lucky enough to get that hour. You become efficient and productive and realize that all the things you used to do to procrastinate were not a necessary part of the process.”

Procrastination is a luxury, Polley says, and not one parents with wee children can afford. “I’ll have ideas while I’m doing other things, but really, you don’t have that kind of time. You have to accept yourself far more as a kind of craftsperson than as an artist. I think it’s a healthy shift: to think of yourself as more of a carpenter than some kind of precarious fairy who needs every condition to be right to spin their magic tales. That’s not going to happen.”

Thus Polley’s writing routine for *Alias Grace* revolved around her kids’ sleep routines. “I wrote most of this screenplay during their naps. And I couldn’t have done any of that without a partner who had a flexible schedule. Something that really inspired me was reading about Carol Shields. When she was writing her first novel she had four kids. When the youngest went to preschool in the mornings, she would then take the others to school. She would come up, spend about an hour tidying up socks or whatever had to be done, and then she had just one hour to write. And that hour was non-negotiable. It was the only time she had. And in nine months she had a novel. That was the only time I read about a writer’s process that was helpful in any way.”

Polley is blunt about the balancing of priorities, and reflects on her own past as a child actor. “I missed my own childhood, I wasn’t interested in missing out on my own kids’ childhood. I love making movies and writing, but I really wanted to have kids. I was lucky because my career was established before I had kids. So I have been incredibly privileged. I think it’s really hard to be starting out and be this involved in parenting. This works for me and I’m lucky to be doing it.”

As Polley wrote, she says she thought about period films that didn’t necessarily have traditional narrative structures. “I thought about pieces that didn’t have formal structures, at least not in the way we normally think of them. I thought a lot about Terrence Malick’s films, in particular *Days of Heaven*. I also thought about Mary’s movies [Mary Harron, who directed *Alias Grace*], like *American Psycho* and *I Shot Andy Warhol*, films that had a certain edge and brutality to them but



Sarah Gadon plays Grace Marks, a poor Irish immigrant and domestic servant who finds herself accused and convicted of murdering her employer and his housekeeper

“You have to accept yourself far more as a kind of craftsperson than as an artist. I think it’s a healthy shift: to think of yourself as more of a carpenter than some kind of precarious fairy who needs every condition to be right to spin their magic tales. That’s not going to happen.”



Sarah Gadon plays Grace Marks in the Sarah Polley adaptation of Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace* on CBC and Netflix

also an intelligence. But generally, I don't think too much about other films when I'm writing."

Polley is also aware that we are in the midst of what appears to be a Margaret Atwood Moment, with the TV miniseries adaptation of the dystopic sci-fi thriller *The Handmaid's Tale* sweeping the Emmys, and now *Alias Grace*. The screenwriters of *The Handmaid's Tale* have taken some liberties with their adaptation, building on current Trump-era anxieties to ramp up the resonance factor. But Polley says her screenplay has remained quite faithful to the source material. "I would say the adaptation is quite true to the book. Obviously, there were changes that had to be made in terms of structure, but we didn't stray too far. The best part of the process is that I would have these marathon meetings with Margaret, both before I started working on it and after I had various drafts. We would sit for four or five hours and I got to ask every question I ever wanted to about the book. It was an amazing experience. I got to ask what the important elements were to her, things that might not have been obvious to me, and make sure those were included."

Since Polley has been fantasizing about this adaptation for decades, many felt she would be the natural fit as director. But again, her parenting left her feeling another director would work just as well. "I've been writing for the past few years, but also writing scripts for other directors. That has allowed me to be present in my kids' lives in way that I wouldn't otherwise be able to. Screenwriting had already been my main passion, the writing is always what I wanted to do, so it's a dream come true to live a life as a writer. But there's also the fact that it's much more conducive to a life with kids."

Polley says the demands of making film and TV are often ludicrous, and she'd like to think it's not too hopeful to imagine that changing. "Shooting is still 17 hours a day or so, and that means I'm going to have to miss my kids waking up and going to bed. That's really hard for me to wrap my head around. That's something about directing that's going to be really hard for me to come back to. I will make another film. I'd like to think that I will be able to make a film in a way that everybody, including the men on the set, will have

“Even if the Canadian is
more talented, more experienced,
more exciting — we have an innate
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loathing that compels us
to think that someone from
somewhere else will
be better.”

time to see their families. To do things other than just working. But also, when I was writing it, I wasn't seeing every shot. I wasn't seeing how certain scenes would be realized. Usually I do. When I thought of Mary directing, I got very excited.”

Film and TV schedules, as they stand, are not conducive to normal functioning, Polley insists. “It's not productive, it's not safe and it's not humane. People are dying after driving home after 16 hours on a set because they fall asleep at the wheel. People fought for the eight-hour workday a long time ago. In the film industry, we're fighting for a 12-hour workday. It makes absolutely no sense. There are children and elderly people who need taking care of. You can't have people working these hours and expect them to do all of these other things.”

In optimistic news, Polley is thrilled that Heritage Minister Mélanie Joly decided (after much lobbying) to send the CRTC decision about Canadian private broadcasters' spending on Canadian content back to the CRTC for review. “This is the ugly, ugly truth. The only thing that will compel Canadians

to hire other Canadians is regulation. I've been in situation after situation with people who believe in the Canadian film industry, believe in Canadian talent, and they're looking for one more exception to bring someone in from somewhere else. If there's any room for an exception, it will be taken. The only power I have in a room like that, with producers or broadcasters, is to say, we can't, we have to hire a Canadian. That's the only power I have. Even if the Canadian is more talented, more experienced, more exciting — we have an innate self-deprecation or even self-loathing that compels us to think that someone from somewhere else will be better. It's something subconscious and something you can't argue with.

“You're going to get written off as someone fighting an ideological battle and waving the flag, even when you're fighting for the best person for the job who happens to be Canadian. The only tool that I have in that fight are the regulations.

“We're just colonized that way. We need regulation to protect us from ourselves.” ■





THIS HOUR HAS 25 YEARS

By Joanie Veitch

Last January, a week after the U.S. presidential inauguration, a video was posted on the *22 Minutes* Facebook page with the tagline: Worried about Trump? Sounds like you need Angry Yoga. In the sketch, Cathy Jones — *This Hour Has 22 Minutes* veteran and brilliant character comedian — leads a yoga class, dropping her soothing tone as she moves into downward dog.

“And if I see one more man with a bun, not a ponytail, a bun with an honest-to-god scrunchy. And those Birkenstocks? Like he’s some kind of homeless samurai? And he’s the one turning me down,” she huffs. By the end of the video — the class now in an extended child’s pose — she’s ranted about airport security, clear cutting, climate change, and government corruption. “Just bang your head a little bit because you’re a little bit angry,” she says, hitting her head on the mat to emphasize each word. “Just. A. Little. Tiny. Bit. Angry.”

The video was a clip from season 22 but it struck gold as people began seeing it on their social media feeds. To date it’s had more than 9.6 million views on Facebook and more than 50 million views when YouTube and other platforms are added in the mix: it’s been shared more than a million times.

“That yoga sketch kind of took us by surprise,” says Peter McBain, showrunner with *22 Minutes* for the past six years. “We knew it was funny, we knew the live audience liked it and it worked on TV but it

“They keep refreshing the writers’ room and that stops it from getting bogged down. It’s risky because you’re always shaking things up, but it’s proved to be a rewarding strategy”

kept getting discovered, it keeps bubbling up as new groups of people find it and share it.”

This fall, *22 Minutes*, which is produced by DHX Media, returns to CBC for its 25th season. The anniversary is a milestone in itself, but in an era of declining television ratings, *22 Minutes* is not only holding its own, through social media and YouTube hits the show is now reaching more viewers than ever before.

The first episode of *This Hour Has 22 Minutes* aired Monday, Oct. 11, 1993 with Cathy Jones, Rick Mercer, Greg Thomey, and Mary Walsh at the helm. Three years before *The Daily Show* with Jon Stewart and 12 years before *The Colbert Report* hit the air, *22 Minutes* was gleefully offering up clever news parody and taking the piss out of politicians.

Filmed in front of a studio audience in Halifax, both the live and television audiences loved it and *22 Minutes* quickly became one of CBC’s top-rated comedy programs, winning numerous accolades, including the Academy Icon Award at the 2016 Canadian Screen Awards.

The cast has changed over the years, of course. Of the original four, only Cathy Jones remains (although Greg Thomey is back as a writer and shows up on air from time to time). Comedic talents such as Colin Mochrie, Gavin Crawford, Geri Hall, and Meredith MacNeill have all spent time at the news desk, along with many other guest hosts and special correspondents. This year, Mark Critch, Cathy Jones, Susan Kent, and Shaun Majumder are all returning to their chairs as news anchors, with comedian Trent McClellan joining the cast this season as well.

“We were fake news before it was cool,” boasts the show’s Twitter bio.

It’s a fitting description.

Taking a satirical look at news and social issues, along with their trademark ambush-style interviews with politicians has become *22 Minutes*’ stock in trade.

Who can forget Marg Delahunty, a.k.a. Marg, Princess Warrior, ambushing Jean Chrétien or Toronto mayor Rob Ford? (Ford called 911 on Marg and the crew.) Or back in 2000, when Rick Mercer got George W. Bush to respond to a question about Prime Minister Jean Poutine? Or how about when Stephen Harper’s security detail handcuffed Geri Hall and nearly had her arrested, or 2014 when Liberal MP Carolyn Parrish took Mark Critch up on his offer to stomp on a George Bush doll? (She was kicked out of caucus for her efforts.) Or the time Critch took a joint out of his pocket and asked then Liberal party leader Justin Trudeau where he could light up? (Trudeau’s people asked *22 Minutes* not to air the piece, which was ignored. “Once they say something like that if you take it out then you’re just working for them, so I had to put it in,” Critch says. “It was good going forward though because it established the rules of the game. If we’re going to do this then we’re going to do it and whatever happens, happens.”)

“Where else can you walk up to a politician like that?” says Critch. “There’s nowhere else in the world that does this ... they don’t do it in the States and they don’t do it in the U.K. This is the only country where that happens and it’s what the viewers have come to expect.”

Over the years the core format of the show has remained largely the same — four anchors poking fun at the news of the week, interviews with “special correspondents,” ad and song parodies, as well as character sketches — but the news landscape has



Mark Critch, Susan Kent, Shaun Majumder, Cathy Jones and Trent McClellan are latest cast incarnation of 22 Minutes



*Various scenes from a typical
22 Minutes table read*

changed dramatically. “Now people tend to talk about how news is interpreted so you’ll get a news story and everyone will be talking about how the media covered the story or who said what on Twitter, so it’s less about the news event and more about that perspective,” says McBain.

Back in the early days of *22 Minutes*, the Internet was a mostly unknown entity vaguely referred to as the “information super-highway” so the writers got their news from actual newspapers, television, and radio. “We used to get papers delivered from across the country but if a flight coming in had too much cargo, those newspapers would often be the first to go and we’d have nothing to work with,” recalls Edward Kay, a Toronto-based writer who left the world of journalism — even turning down an editor position with the *Globe and Mail’s Report on Business* to write for *22 Minutes* from seasons four through seven. “I was the first person on the show that I’m aware of who used the Internet. I’d use some of the early search engines — there was no Google yet — to try to stay ahead of the news. It would have been late 1996 or 1997 and I think I was using it for at least a year before other writers started getting onboard. It’s hard to imagine that now.”

When the show first started, cast members wrote all their own material but writers were soon hired on (Ed Macdonald, Paul Bellini, and Alan Resnick were the first hires) and the show’s first producer, Gerald Lunz, established a writing and production system. That system remains mostly in place today: the day after the show airs, cast members, writers, and producers hold a pitch meeting to discuss ideas before going off to write — usually five to six sketches per person. They hand in their work at 11 a.m. the next day, at which point McBain speedreads through the sketches and makes three piles — yes, no, maybe — to determine what will make it to “the book” and go forward to the read-through (called “the humilatorium” by Lunz, a moniker that stuck). “Wednesdays are nerve-racking because that’s the table read when you find out if your stuff made it, or that nothing of yours is funny enough to get read,” says Allison Hogg, the newest writer on the show. “I always find that the things I liked aren’t as funny as I thought, it’s the other stuff that makes it through ... so you can’t always trust yourself,” Hogg says.

Toughening up comes with practice, but strategy helps too. “In the pitch meeting I don’t give away too many details of my sketch,” says head writer Mike Allison, who has been with *22 Minutes* since 2009. “I’ll say I have an idea and I might do this or that with it. So if it dies at the read-through I don’t feel that flop sweat. But then again, myself and another writer, Bob

Kerr, we hit our 150th episode last year, so 150 times five or six sketches per episode means you’re going to have hundreds of flops. You get used to it.”

Along with the sketches, writers have to produce upwards of 100 copy jokes, the jokes read by the anchors each week. They get written on Thursday and Friday, while the sketches get taped. “They have to continually pump stuff out and not worry too much about whether it’s working or not, because the reality is that 90 to 95 per cent of the work gets thrown away,” says McBain.

Coming from a sketch comedy background, it was a challenge to learn how to write the jokes, says Jennifer Whalen, now with *Baroness von Sketch Show* and a writer with *22 Minutes* from 2003 to 2007, the last two seasons as head writer. “Repetition was the thing. I wrote so many jokes eventually something clicked. It’s a little more technical than writing sketch comedy. I would write a joke and then go through and edit taking out all the extra words — because a copy joke has to be bulletproof and can’t be dependent on the performance; it has to be straight up funny, so it was learning about the economy of words.”

Having a back-up plan helped as well, says Kay. “For every joke I wrote on that show — every single one — I always wrote three different punchlines. In part it was an exercise to force myself to work harder but also, in terms of my ego, I wouldn’t be crushed if one didn’t work — I could come back with something else. Just pushing myself like that was one of the biggest things I ever discovered because I wasn’t over invested in any one thing. I’ve kept that, I still use that in my career now.”

The mix of talent — some coming from sketch comedy, others from the world of stand-up comedy — and the frequent turnover of writers has been a large part of the show’s success, says Angela Mombourquette, a Halifax-based journalist whose book *25 Years of 22 Minutes: An Unofficial Oral History of This Hour Has 22 Minutes*, is being published by Nimbus Publishing in November.

“They keep refreshing the writers’ room and that stops it from getting bogged down. It’s risky because you’re always shaking things up, but it’s proved to be a rewarding strategy,” says Mombourquette.

The show’s “outsider” status has helped too. *22 Minutes* always been filmed in Halifax and over the years most of the cast members have hailed from Newfoundland. “That outsider perspective gives Canadians an outlet for their frustrations with whatever is happening politically or socially,” says Mombourquette. “I think giving a voice to that frustration has been a big part of why the show matters to so many people.” ■

EDWARD KAY COMBINES COMEDY, SCIENCE, AND SLEUTHING IN *ADDISON*

By Diane Wild

A novelist, journalist, and television writer, with credits ranging from sketch comedy to animation to science, for audiences ranging from young children to young adults to grownups, Edward Kay's resume demonstrates an impressive diversity.

After a stint on *This Hour Has 22 Minutes*, Kay wrote the animated series *Olliver's Adventures* and *Jimmy Two-Shoes* as well as the TVO show *Finding Stuff Out*.

He points out that there aren't many timeslots for Canadian comedy shows, but there are many more opportunities — and a more global audience — in animation. "It's true that in Canada the more hats you can wear the more likely you are not to live under a bridge, but I really do have a lot of interests," he says. "You only have so much time, so part of the challenge is focusing on a few different things you do really well and not go too far afield."

His latest focus is *Addison*, a CBC Kids comedic animated series featuring a girl, around six years old, who solves mysteries and builds quirky inventions

using creative problem solving, cooperation, and perseverance. The mysteries usually revolve around a natural phenomenon mistaken for a nefarious deed, and Addison's strength is evaluating information rather than being an encyclopedic genius. Her vulnerability is in jumping to conclusions, so each episode she needs to take a break — by building a complex Rube Goldberg machine, for example — re-evaluate and try again.

"Girls tend to drop out of science and math more so than boys in late middle schools years, and the theory is it's because they're embarrassed at making mistakes," says Kay. "Discovery is a process and some of it is accidental. We show that part of the process is to make mistakes, and you don't give up there."



Edward Kay's current project is Addison, an animated series on CBC, about a six-year-old who solves mysteries

Blue's Clues creator Traci Paige Johnson came up with the idea for *Addison*, seeing it as a way of encouraging girls toward science and technology. Producer Charles Bishop, who worked with Kay on *This Hour Has 22 Minutes*, knew he would be a great fit to bring the idea to life with CBC Kids, where it had been in development but not yet green-lit. Besides his background in writing for comedy and science shows, Kay's *STAR Academy* novels are about a scientifically brilliant girl, written in part to provide a role model for his now 14-year-old daughter Mika.

A single father since she was much younger, Kay is attuned to the subtle ways entertainment can send messages, positive and negative, to girls. He wrote most of the first season of 20 episodes on his own, but

he's noticed an interesting phenomenon as he works with other writers for the 30-episode second season.

"Sometimes writers, both male and female, will give the more active, decision-making dialogue to the boys in the series, even though Addison is the star and the leader of her 'tribe' of kids," he notes. "It has happened often enough to be observable, and I have had to point out to them that Addison is the star, and so not to have boys automatically be the one to leap into the fray first or say, 'Let's go!' to Addison and lead her to the next scene. I try to imagine someone ordering Batman around."

"I have occasionally had the same issue with some — not all — of the board artists. I have had to send notes back pointing out that since Addison is



Addison is an animated series on CBC featuring a six-year-old who meets any challenges on her quest to solve mysteries with her own inventions

the star of the show, she shouldn't be at the edge of a particular frame while the boys are in the centre."

The educational aspect of the show is most visible in its attention to natural phenomenon, but Kay credits CBC with encouraging him to think of the show as entertainment rather than curriculum. "We avoid that moment where someone explains that migratory birds always fly south. You'll never hear someone being didactic," he says. "There are very few people who wouldn't naturally pitch something that has an educational aspect to it. We ourselves are curious about nature and science, so we naturally gravitate to that. Our first job is to make kids laugh and keep them entertained, but do it in an intelligent fashion."

There's a lot to pack into each 11 minute episode, and there's no writers' room to break story together. Unlike his experience on *22 Minutes*, where writers were paid to come into the office, it takes a successful episode pitch for an *Addison* writer, so Kay works with them individually to hone their pitches and work toward a successful script.

He has a low-tech solution to bouncing ideas around and breaking story without being in the same space. "If we had money we would have a

writers' room, but because animation has smaller budgets and writers live all over Canada, we can't do that. But we can do phone calls." Despite writers' propensity to be introverts, he avoids the temptation to use email, which doesn't allow for the synergy of a conversation for riffing on ideas.

"It's a very idiosyncratic show. It's the most difficult show I've ever written for," he says.

He adds, *Addison* will always solve the mystery but she has to get it wrong at least twice, and there has to be a clue in the first scene everyone has overlooked.

"It's never really aliens, but it has to be interesting."

He gives the example of sewer construction in his neighbourhood, which resulted in cryptic blue and orange symbols scrawled on a three-block stretch of sidewalks. "As a kid, that's so weird. If I saw strange arrows and squiggly things pointing to people's houses, and if I had read something about the Nazca lines, which kids do, I might come to a different conclusion."

Kay also has an eight-year-old son whose constant flipping between television and iPad gives him a glimpse of the audience they're trying to reach.

“It’s hard to believe we’re
having a conversation about keeping
someone’s attention for 11 minutes
but that’s what the world has
turned into.”

“They graze. It’s terrifying not so much as a parent but as someone who makes television shows, because it’s so easy to lose a kid.”

He’s become acutely aware of the need for action on screen when writing for this age group — not as in violence and car chases, but “clever shots that grab attention so kids don’t wander away to send a text or go online.”

Whether a pitch is accepted or not is often determined by how much visual information is conveyed. “You need to tell me what we will be looking at,” he says. “I want to know what the mystery is, but I need to know what will be exciting for 11 minutes.”

“It’s hard to believe we’re having a conversation about keeping someone’s attention for 11 minutes but that’s what the world has turned into.”

Animation makes it easier to be surreal and be creative with the visual comedy, and to a degree he can leave some of that magic to the designers. “I know lots of people in live action who would kill to do these kind of Rube Goldberg machines we do,” he says. “When I get the rough sketches I laugh out loud.”

As a live-action showrunner Kay can be on set and collaborate with the director, director of photography, and actors to translate his scripts to screen. “With animation it’s tougher and there’s a lot more people involved. There’s 60 animators sitting in a room and they don’t even see each others’ scenes, which makes it a challenge to make sure there’s a continuity of feel. If you want something

in the right corner of the frame, out of focus in background, it’s much easier in live action than sending notes to someone in a different time zone, which happens in animation.”

Not that he’s complaining, just pointing out a difference. “It’s also really fun. There are things in animation you can’t do in live action. You can’t make crickets behave the way you want them to in real life, but in animation you can. And you can have comically outlandish things that in live action you’d need crazy expensive CGI.”

He talks of the openness of animation directors to collaborate, and the animators embellishing in a “visual version of what a punch-up writer does on a script.”

While he intended to have a viewing party for *Addison*’s premiere, he explains that given the back and forth process of animation, sound, music, “I’ve probably seen that episode 20, 25 times. That’s the horrible part of doing television: you do it because you love it, but by the time it actually airs you just want it to go away.”

That’s one difference from *22 Minutes*, where the show aired days after it was shot. Another is the absence of that live audience. “But I have kids and I read them the scripts. If they laugh I know it’s working. Kids are great that way. They won’t fake it.”

That doesn’t mean he’s done with adult themes. His most recent novel, *At Rope’s End*, is a murder mystery that’s been optioned by Seven24. “The world had entered a dark space and it wasn’t something I could artistically address through kids’ shows.” ■

HOW THE WGC AND ITS MEMBERS FOUGHT BACK

The CRTC decision on private broadcaster minimum spending on Programs of National Interest (PNI) has been sent back for review, after a successful lobbying campaign by our Guild and membership

By Matthew Hays

There are moments when congratulations are in order, and this would be one of those times. When the CRTC's decision arrived on May 15 — one that would have drastically reduced Bell Media and Corus Entertainment's minimum financial contributions to PNI — the Writers Guild of Canada alerted its members to the dangerous fallout of the decision were it to be enacted. After months of lobbying various members of government, Minister of Canadian Heritage Mélanie Joly and the Cabinet of Canada sent the decision back to the CRTC for review — notably, an extremely rare action for a government. With potentially over \$200 million in the balance, this request for a review marks a major victory for the WGC, all of its members, and anyone interested in seeing more Canadian content.

"When I first heard about the decision, it seemed really over-the-top," says WGC member Bruce Smith. "It seemed like a poison pill left by a departing administrator." Smith says he was buoyed by the talking points and tip sheet sent out to all members by the WGC administration. "[Executive Director] Maureen Parker has really been incredible," he says.

As a result, Smith wrote to Joly and also requested a meeting with his own MP, Marc Garneau. "His staff was not aware of the specifics of this decision and its impact," he recalls. "But they were very open in the meeting and were clearly concerned. I made the case very simply: while it may seem like the

business is booming when the dollar is low, when the dollar goes back up that service production will leave and we'll have nothing. I said now was not the time to abandon Canadian content." And Smith says there was a huge takeaway in all of this: "You could feel the impact the lobbying of WGC members was having. It was encouraging to feel that you could participate in democracy so directly."

Another WGC member, Edward Kay, had a similar experience, but he says his main lessons came from his daughter. "I'm not much of a joiner when it comes to politics," he concedes, even though he has written political humour for *This Hour Has 22 Minutes*. "My daughter is very close to the librarian at her school, as she is a real bookworm. The librarian happens to be the mother of our MP, Nathaniel Erskine-Smith. So I had already met him a couple of times through my daughter."

That connection meant it felt easy for Kay to reach out to Erskine-Smith. "I wrote to him to ask for a meeting and he got back to me within 45 minutes. We had a meeting set up for within the week. And we met for an hour. He is a lawyer, so I was prepared for tough questions. I made the point that in France and Australia, they have far more domestic content on their TV screens than we do, in some cases many times more than we do. He really listened and I could see he was hearing what I was saying. He said he would write to Joly about it."



“ I made the case very simply: while it may seem like the business is booming when the dollar is low, when the dollar goes back up that service production will leave and we’ll have nothing.”

“I really learned a lot about how to lobby. Being prepared to persuade someone is so important.”





“ I knew we only had so much time, so I sent him some information in advance, including a *Globe and Mail* article which outlined in detail the economic benefits of the production of one TV show in Canada.”

Kay says “I really learned a lot about how to lobby. Being prepared to persuade someone is so important. Turns out I learned a lot from my daughter!”

WGC member David Schmidt says he was granted a meeting with his MP, Jonathan Wilkinson — but only for 15 minutes. “I knew we only had so much time, so I sent him some information in advance, including a *Globe and Mail* article which outlined in detail the economic benefits of the production of one TV show in Canada. It clearly illustrated the beneficial impact on the local economy. I knew we had to stay focused, and we did. His area of expertise is the environment and business, so we tried to appeal to him in a way that he would clearly understand.”

WGC member Mary Pedersen says she wrote to her MP’s office, “as the WGC urged us to,” she recalls. She got a meeting with her MP, senior cabinet member Carolyn Bennett. “I thought the meeting might be adversarial, but she’s married to a film producer, so she knows quite a bit about the business. Because a big part of her portfolio is indigenous affairs, I pointed out that we are making great strides in representations of women and indigenous people in TV, and TV created by women and indigenous people, and that this was clearly no time to cut back on that progress. Doors are opening now, and timing is everything.”

Pedersen says Bennett was very open to hearing the arguments, and wanted to hear more. “She basically

said please tell me what I can take back to the cabinet to help convince them, and also how we can make the case to the public. I got the strong impression this government wants to do the right thing. She was saying the industry needs to make the case to the public so the government has public opinion on their side.”

WGC member Aron Dunn says he benefitted from being in a riding where many cultural creators live, the Toronto-Danforth district. He set up a meeting with his MP, Julie Dabrusin, and invited other writers and composers to join him. “I stressed that foreign production is great and employs lots of people,” he recalls, “But made the point that if we rely only on that, we’re not telling our own stories.

“And I don’t want to be the Debbie Downer, but we still don’t have the result we want — yet. We have to see what the CRTC says after it reviews its decision.”

Harold Greenberg Fund cut

In the two-steps-forward-one-step-back department is the sad news that the Harold Greenberg Fund — an annual \$1.1 million granted to filmmakers by a not-for-profit agency — would be cut. The fund had helped many high-profile productions including *Maudie* and Xavier Dolan’s *It’s Only the End of the World*, which won the Grand Prix at Cannes. HGF assured industry onlookers that it would maintain its development program, which aids in paying for the costs of adaptations to the screen. ■



Julian Doucet

Words on page more important than all tomorrow's parties

By Cameron Archer

As an actor and voice-over artist, Julian Doucet's work ranges from performing Shakespeare to being the voice of the Ottawa transit system. A 2010 graduate of the CFC Bell Media Prime Time TV program and inaugural alumnus of the National Screen Institute's Movie Central Script to Screen program, Doucet created and wrote for Unis TV's first original series *St-Nickel* in 2016. Having joined Temple Street Productions' *Killjoys* in its second season as writer and script editor, Doucet returned for the third season as co-producer. He currently works on *Killjoys*' fourth and fifth seasons. *Killjoys* was recently renewed through its fifth and final season by Space (Bell Media) and Syfy (NBCUniversal).

Unis TV is a broadcaster entering the world of scripted programming. What issues did that pose for you as a screenwriter?

Unis TV was super excited to get into the scripting game and had a ton of support from sister broadcaster TV5 in Quebec. TV5 brought with it a wealth of scripted programming experience. Any challenges that arose revolved around agreeing on tone. Unis TV knew it wanted its programming to reflect the diversity of French-

speaking Canada, but a large chunk of its audience would be from Quebec. Reflecting French-speaking Canada is not the same as appealing to a Quebecois audience. Franco-Ontarians, Acadians or Franco-Manitobans may share a language with Quebec but are very different culturally.

How does working for a French-language broadcaster differ from working for an English-language broadcaster? Although Unis TV focuses on French Canadians outside of Quebec, and St-Nickel is set in Sudbury, the French-language industry in Canada is distinct from its English counterpart.

They're night and day. English Canada uses a showrunner-driven model whereas Quebec follows a director/auteur model. What's great is we're starting to see a little more of a melding between the two, as Quebec franchises get English adaptations and vice versa.

You've been with Killjoys since its second season. How did you deal with entering an established series, especially one with clear fan and broadcaster support?

How to deal with the best-case scenario ... is that a trick question? Sure, it can be intimidating coming into a hit show. You don't want to be

the one to mess it up! The challenge is to find the stories that help the show evolve and stay fresh without betraying its heart. The heart of the show is what brings the fans and earns the broadcasters' faith. You have to protect it. Luckily, there are six or seven other champions in the room with you.

How did you become established in screenwriting? What should the aspiring screenwriter expect when transitioning from another discipline to screenwriting?

I was an actor who started writing plays who stumbled into the CFC. The rest is a lot of flailing, anxiety, some lucky breaks and hard work. To the aspiring screenwriter I wish I could say there's a sure-fire path. Some of us hit it quick. Some of us are slow burners. Most of us are making it up as we go. Be patient, be persistent, and write — a lot. Push past perfectionism and put words on the page.

In the long run, knowing your voice will serve you better than sweating about parties and meetings. In fact, it will help with sweating at parties and meetings. Many of us transitioned from other disciplines. The good thing is, the perspective that the other disciplines bring is often what makes your writing compelling to broadcasters and producers. ■

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.



Shebli Zarghami

He gets the last laugh

By Greg David

Shebli Zarghami's love of comedy comes naturally, but writing it for television didn't. Growing up in Montreal, he was exposed to Woody Allen and Charlie Chaplin films by his parents; as a young adult he devoured stand-up comedy. But writing for laughs wasn't even considered. Zarghami regarded it as "a magical box that was there for watching and enjoying."

It wasn't until Zarghami, working as a copy editor at McGill University, considered screenwriting as a career after hearing from some friends who were doing it. After writing and producing the webseries *Agnes & Harold* in 2011, Zarghami applied to the Canadian Film Centre's Bell Media Prime Time TV Program. He had just one week to go before completing the course when he was plucked from the CFC to work on CBC's long-running comedy, *Mr. D*.

You wrote and produced the webseries *Agnes & Harold* in 2011. It really was ahead of its time predating the current popularity of webseries.

It was right at a time when it felt more accessible to get things like that made. At the time, the web was seen as a starting point and

TV was the place you wanted to get to. Now, there is a lot of web stuff where that might be the best way to actually get things seen. I love following the evolution of mediums and the platforms, and trying to figure out what's next.

How did the CFC Prime Time TV Program benefit you as a writer?

Comedy was always something I felt comfortable with and knowledgeable in, but structure was a huge thing I learned about at the CFC. I had done *Agnes & Harold*, but doing the CFC's short film meant you were really like the showrunner of this small project. That was very helpful leading into *Mr. D*. I would have had a much more difficult on-set experience on *Mr. D* without that experience. It was really important to me to get that validation of having people read my writing, get feedback, and get accepted into a program that I had gone into knowing that it was very difficult to get into.

What scripts did you write when you applied to the CFC?

I did two. At the time they wanted one original and one spec. The spec script was for *Modern Family*, which I think everybody did back

when it started. The original was called *Retail* and I wrote about my experience working in a retail store when I finished university. It was sort of cathartic for me. It was a job that I was sort of embarrassed about and at the time I felt down about myself. I had gone into university thinking I would have a job when I got out. I was disappointed in the fact that I was working in retail, which was the job I could have gotten before I went into university. To turn that down period in my life into the show that got me into the CFC was a very cathartic thing.

Working on *Mr. D* reunited you with Jessie Gabe, who was a producer with you on *Agnes & Harold*. She is the head writer and executive producer on *Mr. D*. You've been with the show the last four seasons; what has this experience been like?

It's a really supportive place. When I first started, I was so excited to be doing it as a career. It was my goal to make it, as a living, in comedy and that was officially it when the paycheques started coming in. It was also my objective not to become jaded over time.

Season 7 of *Mr. D* is currently airing on CBC. ■

News from WGC Members

Anne-Marie Perrotta's animated pre-school series, *Etta's Star*, was optioned by Big Jump Entertainment. She is currently writing for the live-action series *Circus Kids* and *Cutie Pugs*. On the animation front, she is co-story editing/writing for *Ping & Pong* and writing for *Hello Charlie* and *Ranger Rob*.

Darren Kotania's *Death of Virgil*, a feature-length screenplay about a successful man who unexpectedly dies and finds his true love in the afterlife, was selected as a finalist by the 7th International Catalina Film Festival to represent Canada in the Best Screenplay category.

After wrapping on Syfy/Netflix's *Ghost Wars*, **Gemma Holdway** completed the bootcamp training portion of the National Screen Institute's Totally Television program in Toronto. Up to two teams will accelerate to the next stage of the program next year.

Christina Ray spent six months channelling doomsday cult leader Joseph Seed — writing the sermons and manifesto for *Far Cry 5's* new archvillain. Now she's adapting a role playing game into a live action TV series for Big Jump Entertainment.

Claire Cappelletti wrote six episodes of the TVO children's series *Finding Stuff Out*, currently in season five. Her episode of TVO's *The Mystery Files* titled *Nostra Culpa* has been selected as a finalist for the 2017 Japan Prize.

Darryl Bouley recently wrapped his second season on the Hermes Platinum Award-winning series, *Scotiabank Heroes of Hockey Day in Canada*, where he played an integral role producing and supervising the highly creative challenges for the series.

Lisa Rose Snow's first short documentary, *Meet Maurice Crosby*, had its world premiere at FIN: Atlantic International Film Festival, and will continue to screen at festivals across the country.

Will Pascoe is currently writing on season two of Hulu's *Shut Eye* and writing a pilot for the Syfy Channel.

Daytime Emmy nominee **Jiro C. Okada** has stepped away from the producer's chair after wrapping two seasons of *True and the Rainbow Kingdom*, a Guru Studio and Netflix original. Jiro is now helming season three as executive story editor.

Do You Know Me Now?, a short doc on personhood and caregiving has won two awards, a Silver Remi from the Houston WorldFest 2017, and a Merit Award from Best Shorts Festival, La Jolla, California, for writer/director **Judith Murray**.

Sean O'Byrne's feature *I Am You* began production in October in Turkey. His short film *Weekend Getaway*, which he wrote directed and produced, won at IndieFEST

Film Awards — Award of Merit Special Mention. He just entered into a development deal on *Red Carpet Burns* based on the book of the same name.

Barry Stevens wrote and directed a film broadcast this fall on TVO called *Undercover Jihadi*, produced by Matter of Fact Media.

Collin Friesen is finishing up post production on his first feature, *Sorry For Your Loss*, starring Justin Bartha, Bruce Greenwood, and Inbar Lavi. His TV series *NGO* is in development for the IFC network.

John Hazlett, Lienne Sawatsky, and **Dan Williams** are pleased as punch that their animated series *Wishfart* started airing in the UK on CITV. Coming to Teletoon this March — so WATCH OUT! Props to all the awesome WGC writers who contributed.

James Motluk received a Platinum Remi Award at Houston Worldfest for his documentary on Cpl. Filip Konowal, who earned a Victoria Cross at the Battle of Hill 70 in 1917. *Konowal* premiered on CBC Documentary channel in May.

Louise Moon's adventures in preschool animation continued this year with *Paw Patrol* for Spinmaster, *Ranger Rob* for Nelvana, *The Cat in the Hat Knows a Lot About That!* for Portfolio Entertainment, and *Count on Me* for Brazil's 2D Lab.



Screenwriter/director **Jason Hreno's** latest film, the multi-award winning *Motherland*, a U.K. set and shot political drama about the aftermath of the Malian conflict, has been nominated for Best Short Film by the Directors Guild of Canada.

Nicole Demerse is currently enjoying channeling her inner sorcerer on season four of the hour drama *Good Witch*.

Gary Pearson's new comedic science fiction novel, *Marooned in Space!*, about an unlikely collection of galactic explorers, has been launched, and is available at Amazon all over the world.

Andrew Daley's second novel, *Resort*, will be published this fall by Tightrope Books. It follows the misadventures of two former Toronto television actors who now work as con artists in tropical resorts. It's a love story, really.

Mina Shum premiered her latest feature *Meditation Park* at TIFF '17. The film continues on the festival circuit and opened VIFF '17. Its theatrical release is March 9, 2018. After festival season Shum will direct *This Hour has 22 Minutes* and start raising financing for her next features, *Two of Me* (co-written with **Bob Martin**) and *The Lotus* (co-written with **Dennis Foon**).

Jennica Harper wrote on *Cardinal: Black Fly Season*, as well as the ABC summer thriller *Somewhere Between*. She is currently developing

a comedy series for Jann Arden (Project 10 Productions/CTV).

Third Street Press is publishing **Doug Molitor's** novels *Monster, He Wrote* and *Pure Silver*, and republishing *Memoirs of a Time Traveler*.

David Schmidt is writing for the new WWII series, *Hitler's Last Stand*, for Parallax Film Productions and the National Geographic Channel. He also wrote and is co-executive producing, along with **Kate Green**, the sci-fi digital series, *NarcoLeap*, funded by the IPF and Telus STORYHIVE.

Peter Meech has just finished shooting *Around Robin*, a thriller that he produced, wrote and directed.

Kariné Marwood and **Julie Kim** co-wrote *Love Blossoms*, which aired in the U.S. in February garnering the highest viewing during Hallmark's Valentine's Day week, and in May on Superchannel in Canada. This is the second feature the writing duo saw to fruition. *Joseph and Mary* was released on DVD in 2016 for the faith-based market. They are currently developing their third feature, *Baked Alaska*.

Marcia Johnson's short play *Single Use*, written for Climate Change Theatre Action, will be presented at least three times during this yearly global event (Oct. 1-Nov. 18). *Single Use* also had a reading at Toronto Cold Read Series at the Social Capital Theatre.

Ryan W. Smith recently completed producing the sci-fi thriller feature, *Volition*, which he co-wrote with his brother, the film's director, Tony Dean Smith. Ryan has also just signed as a writer with Creative Artists Agency in L.A.

On the heels of the fourth installment of their Hallmark Movies and Mysteries franchise, *The Gourmet Detective*, **Becky Southwell** and **Dylan Neal** (writers/executive producers) have been asked for a fifth installment. The duo is also writing and executive producing a romcom for The Hallmark Channel called *Truly, Madly, Sweetly*, airing spring 2018.

After completing executive producer and writer duties on *Ghost Wars* for SYFY and Netflix, **Dennis Heaton** has signed on as executive producer in residence at the CFC for the Prime Time program. He is currently developing a new original series with the program's residents: Lisa Codrington, A.J. Demers, Julia Holdway, R.J. Lackie, Jordi Mand, and L.A. Smith.

Jeremy Rafuse was an Official Selection at the 2017 Beverly Hills Film Festival for the screenplay titled "Pearl Hart."

After a successful festival run, including Best Feature at Vittorio Veneto Film Festival, **Carolyn Saunders'** debut feature, *The Wasting*, will hit Canadian theatres in early 2018. She's now in prep on her next film, *Island West*. ■

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*
Joe Flanigan — *Stargate*
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*
János Szanyi — *Revolution's Orphans*
Gilles Toupin — *Cycling: Still the Greatest*
Peter Vogler — *Ernie's Idea*

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subject WGC Awards Judges.

Indicate your choice of category.

Members may only judge
categories in which they are
not entered.

Welcome (Apr. 28 — Oct. 4, 2017)

Ben Hernandez Bray Los Angeles CA

Jeremy Bunsie-St-Onge Toronto ON

Greg Cochrane Toronto ON

Gisele Corinthios Toronto ON

North Darling Calgary AB

Melissa de la Cruz Los Angeles CA

David Elmaleh Toronto ON

Jamie Elman Los Angeles CA

Aaron Eves Toronto ON

Brett Heard Toronto ON

Trevor Jeffery Toronto ON

Wendy Litner Toronto ON

Joanne Miller Halifax NS

Laura Miner Toronto ON

Martina Monro Vancouver BC

Pavan Moondi Toronto ON

Topher Payne Atlanta GA

TW Peacocke Toronto ON

Joe Pernice Toronto ON

Eric Putzer Toronto ON

Graham Sack New York NY

Kat Sandler Toronto ON

Sarah Elizabeth Shelson Toronto ON

Phoef Sutton South Pasadena CA

Winter Tekenos-Levy Toronto ON

Donna Thorland Salem MA

Amy Van Curen Culver City CA

Jayson Zambito Lorraine QC

Matthew Zambito Lorraine QC

Our condolences

Bruce Armstrong Halifax NS

David Flaherty Toronto ON

Ronald Hambleton Toronto ON

John Harbron Regina SK

Ray Jessel Studio City CA

Patrick O'Flaherty St. John's NL

Brendan Russell Hamilton ON

David Watmough Delta BC

Helene White Calgary AB

David Widdicombe Toronto ON

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The 5 Ways You'll Procrastinate From Writing

By Ian MacIntyre

Every writer procrastinates. This is a fact. To wit, I literally just procrastinated in writing the introductory sentence for my procrastination article. The struggle is real.

(For the record, I went to the kitchen for coffee and instagrammed a picture of my cat, Jack. It was adorable.)

It's important to recognize which types of procrastinating behaviours you engage in. Not so that you can work to overcome them through discipline — this ain't that kind of column. However, if you'd like to identify which specific laziness trap is keeping you from completing your outline/ screenplay/ original pilot that's actually a thinly-veiled *Wyonna Earp* rip-off, then here are the main five.

1. Productive Procrastination

The most socially acceptable form of procrastination, and my own personal drug of choice (particularly since actual drugs scare me). Includes cleaning, organizing, and completing all the piddly life tasks you ordinarily wouldn't touch with a ten foot pole if the alternative wasn't actual writing. The best part of Productive Procrastination is, in addition to a spotless bathtub, it allows you to try out the *feeling* of actual accomplishment. Every dish you wash and closet you re-organize is a bite-sized dopamine sampler of what it will feel like when/ if you actually finish your draft!

Shame Scale - 2 out of 5 loads of laundry

2. Unproductive Procrastination

Productiveness's craven, but way cooler, cousin. The main reason to become a writer, beside artistic expression *blah blah*, is to be your own boss! Work on your own schedule — even if that schedule includes staying up until 3 a.m. and binge-watching an entire season of *Letterkenny*. Not to mention, as a screenwriter, watching TV **totally** counts as research, or so you tell your loved ones/ colleagues/ self.

Shame Scale - 3 out of 5 Netflix "Are You Still Watching?" prompts

3. Internet Procrastination

Take the machine that writers practice their entire craft on. Now, hook it up to every piece of information and entertainment the human race has ever put online. Internet Procrastination generally breaks down one of three ways:

Informational: Traditionally rationalized as "research." In other words, studying the history and evolution of the French trebuchet during the Crusades will prove crucial on your next *ZhuZhu Pets* draft.

Shopping: In the Golden Age of Hollywood, writers actually had to go outside to something called a "shopping mall" to procrastinate with retail therapy. But the future is now! What better way to spend those production fees you haven't yet finished earning than on amazon.ca, anthro-

pologie.com, or ResearchBooksIll-NeverActuallyRead.shop.org.

"Other": <awkwardly clears throat> There's... another way that writers use the Internet to procrastinate, and no one's here to judge (unless that's your thing, in which case, uh, how naughty of you?). Just rest assured that you are not alone, even though by definition this is how writers procrastinate when they are **the most** alone.

Shame Scale - 4 out of 5 salon.com thinkpieces

4. Social Procrastination

Not all procrastination is... solitary. There's also the time-honoured tradition of meeting other writers, to complain about writing! Whether coffee, booze, or some godawful coffee-infused microbrew, writers can usually be found drinking while gossiping. Topics may include: the script they're avoiding; the script they intend to start avoiding; and TV shows they agree are awful but would give their eye teeth to get staffed on.

Shame Scale - 4.5 out of 5 extra rounds you didn't think you'd order

5. Edible Procrastination

Requires no explanation.

Shame Scale - 0 out of 5 Fudgee-Os. THERE IS NO SHAME IN SNACKS! ■

November

8 - 19 — Reel Asian Film Festival reelasian.com

9 - 19 — Montreal International Documentary Festival ridm.qc.ca/en

18 — Writers Talking TV (Vancouver) wgc.ca

21 — Writers Talking TV (Toronto) wgc.ca

29 - Dec. 3 — Whistler Film Festival whistlerfilmfestival.com

December

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

January

31 - Feb. 2 — Prime Time in Ottawa primetimeinottawa.ca

March

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

20 — Writers Talking TV wgc.ca



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